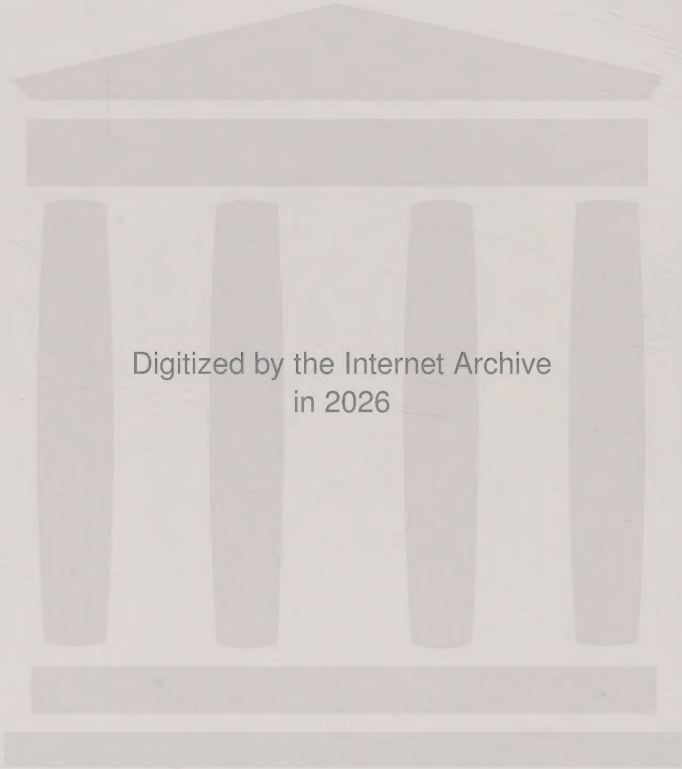
THE NOVELS
TALES & SKETCHES
OF J M BARRIE

R. D. Jackson.


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/sentimentaltommy0000jmba_v3j3

J. M. BARRIE

VOL. VI

SENTIMENTAL TOMMY

THE NOVELS, TALES AND SKETCHES OF J. M. BARRIE

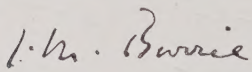
SENTIMENTAL TOMMY

PART I

PUBLISHED IN
NEW YORK BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S
SONS 1896

LONDON: HODDER & STOUGHTON

AUTHOR'S EDITION



Copyright, 1896, by CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.

Copyright in Great Britain, and included in this edition by arrangement with CASSELL & COMPANY, LTD.

THE DE VINNE PRESS, NEW YORK, U. S. A.

TO

MY WIFE

INTRODUCTION

THIS is not in the smallest degree the book I meant it to be. Tommy ran away with the author.

When we meet a man who interests us, and is perhaps something of an enigma, we may fall a-wondering what sort of boyhood he had; and so it is with writers who become inquisitive about their own creations. It was Sentimental Tommy the man that I intended to write of here; I had thought him out as carefully as was possible to me; but I suppose I saw the end more clearly than the beginning, for when I sat down to make a start I felt that I could not really know him at one and twenty unless I could picture him at fifteen, and one's character is so fixed at fifteen that I saw I must go farther back for him, and so I journeyed to his childhood. Even then I meant merely to summarize his early days, but I was loth to leave him, or perhaps it was he who was loth to grow up, having a suspicion of what was in store for him. "Let us have one more game in the Den," he cried, and I was a tool in his hands. But though we may put off the evil day as long as we can, come it must in the end.

CONTENTS

Part I

		PAGE
I	TOMMY CONTRIVES TO KEEP ONE OUT	1
II	BUT THE OTHER GETS IN	16
III	SHOWING HOW TOMMY WAS SUDDENLY TRANSFORMED INTO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN	27
IV	THE END OF AN IDYLL	42
V	THE GIRL WITH TWO MOTHERS	56
VI	THE ENCHANTED STREET	66
VII	COMIC OVERTURE TO A TRAGEDY	78
VIII	THE BOY WITH TWO MOTHERS	90
IX	AULD LANG SYNE	106
X	THE FAVOURITE OF THE LADIES	117
XI	AARON LATTA	133
XII	A CHILD'S TRAGEDY	148
XIII	SHOWS HOW TOMMY TOOK CARE OF ELSPETH	166
XIV	THE HANKY SCHOOL	173
XV	THE MAN WHO NEVER CAME	184
XVI	THE PAINTED LADY	197
XVII	IN WHICH TOMMY SOLVES THE WOMAN PROBLEM	207
XVIII	THE MUCKLEY	217
XIX	CORP IS BROUGHT TO HEEL—GRIZEL DEFIANT	232
XX	THE SHADOW OF SIR WALTER	245

SENTIMENTAL TOMMY

PART I

SENTIMENTAL TOMMY

THE STORY OF HIS BOYHOOD

CHAPTER I

TOMMY CONTRIVES TO KEEP ONE OUT

THE celebrated Tommy first comes into view on a dirty London stair, and he was in sexless garments, which were all he had, and he was five, and so though we are looking at him, we must do it sideways, lest he sit down hurriedly to hide them. That inscrutable face, which made the clubmen of his later days uneasy and even puzzled the ladies while he was making love to them, was already his, except when he smiled at one of his pretty thoughts or stopped at an open door to sniff a potful. On his way up and down the stair he often paused to sniff, but he never asked for anything; his mother had warned him against it, and he carried out her injunction with almost unnecessary spirit, declining offers before

they were made, as when passing a room, whence came the smell of fried fish, he might call in, "I don't not want none of your fish," or "My mother says I don't not want the littlest bit," or wistfully, "I ain't hungry," or more wistfully still, "My mother says I ain't hungry." His mother heard of this and was angry, crying that he had let the neighbours know something she was anxious to conceal, but what he had revealed to them Tommy could not make out, and when he questioned her artlessly, she took him with sudden passion to her flat breast, and often after that she looked at him long and wofully and wrung her hands.

The only other pleasant smell known to Tommy was when the water-carts passed the mouth of his little street. His street, which ended in a dead wall, was near the river, but on the doleful south side of it, opening off a longer street where the cabs of Waterloo station sometimes found themselves when they took the wrong turning; his home was at the top of a house of four floors, each with accommodation for at least two families, and here he had lived with his mother since his father's death six months ago. There was oil-cloth on the stair as far as the second floor; there had been oil-cloth between the second floor and the third — Tommy could point out pieces of it still adhering to the wood like remnants of a plaster.

This stair was nursery to all the children whose

homes opened on it, not so safe as nurseries in the part of London that is chiefly inhabited by boys in sailor suits, but preferable as a centre of adventure, and here on an afternoon sat two. They were very busy boasting, but only the smaller had imagination, and as he used it recklessly, their positions soon changed; sexless garments was now prone on a step, breeches sitting on him.

Shovel, a man of seven, had said, "None on your lip. You weren't never at Thrums yourself."

Tommy's reply was, "Ain't my mother a Thrums woman?"

Shovel, who had but one eye, and that bloodshot, fixed it on him threateningly.

"The Thames is in London," he said.

"'Cos they wouldn't not have it in Thrums," replied Tommy.

"'Amstead 'Eath's in London, I tell yer," Shovel said.

"The cemetery is in Thrums," said Tommy.

"There ain't no queens in Thrums, anyhow."

"There is the Auld Licht minister."

"Well, then, if you jest seed Trafalgar Square!"

"If you jest seed the Thrums town-house!"

"St. Paul's ain't in Thrums."

"It would like to be."

After reflecting, Shovel said in desperation, "Well, then, my father were once at a hanging."

Tommy replied instantly, "It were my father what was hanged."

There was no possible answer to this save a knockdown blow, but though Tommy was vanquished in body, his spirit remained staunch; he raised his head and gasped, "You should see how they knock down in Thrums!" It was then that Shovel sat on him.

Such was their position when an odd figure in that house, a gentleman, passed them without a word, so desirous was he to make a breath taken at the foot of the close stair last him to the top. Tommy merely gaped after this fine sight, but Shovel had experience, and "It's a kid or a coffin," he said sharply, knowing that only birth or death brought a doctor here.

Watching the doctor's ascent, the two boys strained their necks over the rickety banisters, which had been polished black by trousers of the past, and sometimes they lost him, and then they saw his legs again.

"Hello, it's your old woman!" cried Shovel. "Is she a deader?" he asked, brightening, for funerals made a pleasant stir on the stair.

The question had no meaning for bewildered Tommy, but he saw that if his mother was a deader, whatever that might be, he had grown great in his companion's eye. So he hoped she was a deader.

"If it's only a kid," Shovel began, with such scorn that Tommy at once screamed, "It ain't!" and, cross-examined, he swore eagerly that his mother was in bed when he left her in the morning, that she was still in bed at dinner-time, also that the sheet was over her face, also that she was cold.

Then she was a deader, and had attained distinction in the only way possible in that street. Shovel did not shake Tommy's hand warmly, the forms of congratulation varying in different parts of London, but he looked his admiration so plainly that Tommy's head waggled proudly. Evidently, whatever his mother had done redounded to his glory as well as to hers, and somehow he had become a boy of mark. He said from his elevation that he hoped Shovel would believe his tales about Thrums now, and Shovel, who had often cuffed Tommy for sticking to him so closely, cringed in the most snobbish manner, craving permission to be seen in his company for the next three days. Tommy, the upstart, did not see his way to grant this favor for nothing, and Shovel offered a knife, but did not have it with him; it was his sister Ameliar's knife, and he would take it from her, help his davy. Tommy would wait there till Shovel fetched it. Shovel, baffled, wanted to know what Tommy was putting on hairs for. Tommy smiled, and asked whose mother was a deader.

Then Shovel collapsed, and his wind passed into Tommy.

The reign of Thomas Sandys, nevertheless, was among the shortest, for with this question was he overthrown: "How did yer know she were cold?"

"Because," replied Tommy, triumphantly, "she tell me herself."

Shovel only looked at him, but one eye can be so much more terrible than two, that plop, plop, plop came the balloon softly down the steps of the throne and at the foot shrank pitifully, as if with Ameliar's knife in it.

"It's only a kid arter all!" screamed Shovel, furiously. Disappointment gave him eloquence, and Tommy cowered under his sneers, not understanding them, but they seemed to amount to this, that in having a baby he had disgraced the house.

"But I think," he said, with diffidence, "I think I were once one."

Then all Shovel could say was that he had better keep it dark on that stair.

Tommy squeezed his fist into one eye, and the tears came out at the other. A good-natured impulse was about to make Shovel say that though kids are undoubtedly humiliations, mothers and boys get used to them in time, and go on as brazenly as before, but it was checked by Tommy's unfortunate question, "Shovel, when will it come?"

Shovel, speaking from local experience, replied truthfully that they usually came very soon after the doctor, and at times before him.

"It ain't come before him," Tommy said, confidently.

"How do yer know?"

"'Cos it weren't there at dinner-time, and I been here since dinner-time."

The words meant that Tommy thought it could only enter by way of the stair, and Shovel quivered with delight. "H'st!" he cried, dramatically, and to his joy Tommy looked anxiously down the stair, instead of up it.

"Did you hear it?" Tommy whispered.

Before he could control himself Shovel blurted out: "Do you think as they come on their feet?"

"How then?" demanded Tommy; but Shovel had exhausted his knowledge of the subject. Tommy, who had begun to descend to hold the door, turned and climbed upwards, and his tears were now but the drop left in a cup too hurriedly dried. Where was he off to? Shovel called after him, and he answered, in a determined whisper: "To shove of it out if it tries to come in at the winder."

This was enough for the more knowing urchin, now so full of good things that with another added he must spill, and away he ran for an audience, which could also help him to bait Tommy, that

being a game most sportive when there are several to fling at once. At the door he knocked over, and was done with, a laughing little girl who had strayed from a more fashionable street. She rose solemnly, and kissing her muff, to reassure it if it had got a fright, toddled in at the first open door to be out of the way of unmannerly boys.

Tommy, climbing courageously, heard the door slam, and looking down he saw — a strange child. He climbed no higher. It had come.

After a long time he was one flight of stairs nearer it. It was making itself at home on the bottom step; resting, doubtless, before it came hopping up. Another dozen steps, and — It was beautifully dressed in one piece of yellow and brown that reached almost to its feet, with a bit left at the top to form a hood, out of which its pert face peeped impudently; oho, so they came in their Sunday clothes. He drew so near that he could hear it cooing: thought itself as good as upstairs, did it!

He bounced upon her sharply, thinking to carry all with a high hand. "Out you go!" he cried, with the action of one heaving coals.

She whisked round, and, "Oo boy or oo girl?" she inquired, puzzled by his dress.

"None of your cheek!" roared insulted manhood.

"Oo boy," she said, decisively.

With the effrontery of them when they are young, she made room for him on her step, but he declined the invitation, knowing that her design was to skip up the stair the moment he was off his guard.

"You don't needn't think as we'll have you," he announced, firmly. "You had best go away to — go to —" His imagination failed him. "You had best go back," he said.

She did not budge, however, and his next attempt was craftier. "My mother," he assured her, "ain't living here now;" but mother was a new word to the girl, and she asked gleefully, "Oo have mother?" expecting him to produce it from his pocket. To coax him to give her a sight of it she said plaintively, "Me no have mother."

"You won't not get mine," replied Tommy doggedly.

She pretended not to understand what was troubling him, and it passed through his head that she had to wait there till the doctor came down for her. He might come at any moment.

A boy does not put his hand into his pocket until every other means of gaining his end has failed, but to that extremity had Tommy now come. For months his only splendid possession had been a penny despised by trade because of a large round hole in it, as if (to quote Shovel) some previous owner had cut a farthing out of it. To

tell the escapades of this penny (there are no adventurers like coin of the realm) would be one way of exhibiting Tommy to the curious, but it would be a hard-hearted way. At present the penny was doubly dear to him, having been long lost and lately found. In a noble moment he had dropped it into a charity box hanging forlorn against the wall of a shop, where it lay very lonely by itself, so that when Tommy was that way he could hear it respond if he shook the box, as acquaintances give each other the time of day in passing. Thus at comparatively small outlay did he spread his benevolence over weeks and feel a glow therefrom, until the glow went, when he and Shovel recaptured the penny with a thread and a bent pin.

This treasure he sadly presented to the girl, and she accepted it with glee, putting it on her finger, as if it were a ring, but instead of saying that she would go now she asked him, coolly,

"Oo know tories?"

"Stories!" he exclaimed. "I'll — I'll tell you about Thrums," and was about to do it for love, but stopped in time. "This ain't a good stair for stories," he said, cunningly. "I can't not tell stories on this stair, but I — I know a good stair for stories."

The ninny of a girl was completely hoodwinked; and see, there they go, each with a hand in the muff, the one leering, oh, so triumphantly; the

other trusting and gleeful. There was an exuberance of vitality about her as if she lived too quickly in her gladness, which you may remember in some child who visited the earth for but a little while.

How superbly Tommy had done it! It had been another keen brain pitted against his, and at first he was not winning. Then up came Thrums, and — But the thing has happened before; in a word, Blücher. Nevertheless, Tommy just managed it, for he got the girl out of the street and on to another stair no more than in time to escape a ragged rabble, headed by Shovel, who, finding their quarry gone, turned on their leader viciously, and had gloomy views of life till his cap was kicked down a sewer, which made the world bright again.

Of the tales told by Tommy that day in words Scotch and cockney, of Thrums, home of heroes and the arts, where the lamps are lit by a magician called Leerie-leerie-licht-the-lamps (but he is also friendly, and you can fling stones at him), and the merest children are allowed to set the spinning-wheels a-whirling, and dagont is the swear, and the stairs are so fine that the houses wear them outside for show, and you drop a pail at the end of a rope down a hole, and sometimes it comes up full of water, and sometimes full of fairies — of these and other wonders, if you would know, ask not a dull historian, nor even go to Thrums, but to those

rather who have been boys and girls there and now are exiles. Such a one Tommy knows, an unhappy woman, foolish, not very lovable, flung like a stone out of the red quarry upon a land where it cannot grip, and tearing her heart for a sight of the home she shall see no more. From her Tommy had his pictures, and he colored them rarely.

Never before had he such a listener. "Oh, dagont, dagont!" he would cry in ecstasy over these fair scenes, and she, awed or gurgling with mirth according to the nature of the last, demanded "'Nother, 'nother!" whereat he remembered who and what she was, and showing her a morsel of the new one, drew her to more distant parts, until they were so far from his street that he thought she would never be able to find the way back.

His intention had been, on reaching such a spot, to desert her promptly, but she gave him her hand in the muff so confidingly that against his judgment he fell a-pitying the trustful mite who was wandering the world in search of a mother, and so easily diddled on the whole that the chances were against her finding one before morning. Almost unconsciously he began to look about him for a suitable one.

They were now in a street much nearer to his own home than the spurts from spot to spot had led him to suppose. It was new to him, but he

recognized it as the acme of fashion by those two sure signs; railings with most of their spikes in place, and cards scored with the word "Apartments." He had discovered such streets as this before when in Shovel's company, and they had watched the toffs go out and in, and it was a lordly sight, for first the toff waggled a rail that was loose at the top and then a girl, called the servant, peeped at him from below, and then he pulled the rail again, and then the door opened from the inside, and you had a glimpse of wonder-land with a place for hanging hats on. He had not contemplated doing anything so handsome for the girl as this, but why should he not establish her here? There were many possible mothers in view, and thrilling with a sense of his generosity he had almost fixed on one but mistrusted the glint in her eye, and on another when she saved herself by tripping and showing an undarned heel.

He was still of an open mind when the girl of a sudden cried, gleefully, "Ma-ma, ma-ma!" and pointed, with her muff, across the street. The word was as meaningless to Tommy as mother had been to her, but he saw that she was drawing his attention to a woman some thirty yards away.

"Man — man!" he echoed, chiding her ignorance; "no, no, you blether, that ain't a man, that's a woman; that's woman — woman."

"Ooman — ooman," the girl repeated, docilely,

but when she looked again, "Ma-ma, ma-ma," she insisted, and this was Tommy's first lesson that however young you catch them they will never listen to reason.

She seemed of a mind to trip off to this woman, and as long as his own mother was safe, it did not greatly matter to Tommy whom she chose, but if it was this one, she was going the wrong way about it. You cannot snap them up in the street.

The proper course was to track her to her house, which he proceeded to do, and his quarry, who was looking about her anxiously, as if she had lost something, gave him but a short chase. In the next street to the one in which they had first seen her, a street so like it that Tommy might have admired her for knowing the difference, she opened the door with a key and entered, shutting the door behind her. Odd to tell, the child had pointed to this door as the one she would stop at, which surprised Tommy very much.

On the steps he gave her his final instructions, and she dimpled and gurgled, obviously full of admiration for him, which was a thing he approved of, but he would have liked to see her a little more serious.

"That is the door. Well, then, I'll waggle the rail as makes the bell ring, and then I'll run."

That was all, and he wished she had not giggled most of the time. She was sniggering, as if she

thought him a very funny boy, even when he rang the bell and bolted.

From a safe place he watched the opening of the door, and saw the frivolous thing lose a valuable second in waving the muff to him. "In you go!" he screamed beneath his breath. Then she entered and the door closed. He waited an hour, or two minutes, or thereabout, and she had not been ejected. Triumph!

With a drum beating inside him Tommy strutted home, where, alas, a boy was waiting to put his foot through it.

CHAPTER II

BUT THE OTHER GETS IN

To Tommy, a swaggerer, came Shovel sour-visaged; having now no cap of his own, he exchanged with Tommy, would also have bled the blooming mouth of him, but knew of a revenge that saves the knuckles: announced, with jeers and offensive finger exercise, that "it" had come.

Shovel was a liar. If he only knowed what Tommy knowed!

If Tommy only heard what Shovel had hearn!

Tommy was of opinion that Shovel hadn't not heard anything.

Shovel believed as Tommy didn't know nuthin.

Tommy wouldn't listen to what Shovel had heard.

Neither would Shovel listen to what Tommy knew.

If Shovel would tell what he had heard, Tommy would tell what he knew.

Well, then, Shovel had listened at the door, and heard it mewling.

Tommy knowed it well, and it never mewled.

How could Tommy know it?

'Cos he had been with it a long time.

Gosh! Why, it had only comed a minute ago.

This made Tommy uneasy, and he asked a leading question cunningly. A boy, wasn't it?

No, Shovel's old woman had been up helping to hold it, and she said it were a girl.

Shutting his mouth tightly, which was never natural to him, the startled Tommy mounted the stair, listened and was convinced. He did not enter his dishonored home. He had no intention of ever entering it again. With one salt tear he renounced — a child, a mother.

On his way downstairs he was received by Shovel and party, who planted their arrows neatly. Kids cried steadily, he was told, for the first year. A boy one was bad enough, but a girl one was oh lawks. He must never again expect to get playing with blokes like what they was. Already she had got round his old gal who would care for him no more. What would they say about this in Thrums?

Shovel even insisted on returning him his cap, and for some queer reason, this cut deepest. Tommy about to charge, with his head down, now walked away so quietly that Shovel, who could not help liking the funny little cuss, felt a twinge of remorse, and nearly followed him with a magnanimous offer: to treat him as if he were still respectable.

Tommy lay down on a distant stair, one of the very stairs where *she* had sat with him. Ladies, don't you dare to pity him now, for he won't stand it. Rage was what he felt, and a man in a rage (as you may know if you are married) is only to be soothed by the sight of all womankind in terror of him. But you may look upon your handiwork, and gloat, an you will, on the wreck you have made. A young gentleman trusted one of you; behold the result. O! O! O! O! now do you understand why we men cannot abide you?

If she had told him flat that his mother, and his alone, she would have, and so there was an end of it. Ah, catch them taking a straight road. But to put on those airs of helplessness, to wave him that gay good-by, and then the moment his back was turned, to be off through the air on — perhaps on her muff, to the home he had thought to lure her from. In a word, to be diddled by a girl when one flatters himself he is diddling! S'death, a dashing fellow finds it hard to bear. Nevertheless, he has to bear it, for oh, Tommy, Tommy, 'tis the common lot of man.

His hand sought his pocket for the penny that had brought him comfort in dark hours before now; but, alack, she had deprived him even of it. Never again should his pinkie finger go through that warm hole, and at the thought a sense of his

forlornness choked him, and he cried. You may pity him a little now.

Darkness came and hid him even from himself. He is not found again until a time of the night that is not marked on ornamental clocks, but has an hour to itself on the watch which a hundred thousand or so of London women carry in their breasts; the hour when men steal homewards trickling at the mouth and drawing back from their own shadows to the wives they once went a-maying with, or the mothers who had such travail at the bearing of them, as if for great ends. Out of this, the drunkard's hour, rose the wan face of Tommy, who had waked up somewhere clammy cold and quaking, and he was a very little boy, so he ran to his mother.

Such a shabby dark room it was, but it was home, such a weary worn woman in the bed, but he was her son, and she had been wringing her hands because he was so long in coming, and do you think he hurt her when he pressed his head on her poor breast, and do you think she grudged the heat his cold hands drew from her warm face? He squeezed her with a violence that put more heat into her blood than he took out of it.

And he was very considerate, too: not a word of reproach in him, though he knew very well what that bundle in the back of the bed was.

She guessed that he had heard the news and

stayed away through jealousy of his sister, and by and by she said, with a faint smile, "I have a present for you, laddie." In the great world without, she used few Thrums words now; you would have known she was Scotch by her accent only, but when she and Tommy were together in that room, with the door shut, she always spoke as if her window still looked out on the bonny Marywellbrae. It is not really bonny, it is gey an' mean an' bleak, and you must not come to see it. It is just a steep wind-swept street, old and wrinkled, like your mother's face.

She had a present for him, she said, and Tommy replied, "I knows," with averted face.

"Such a bonny thing."

"Bonny enough," he said bitterly.

"Look at her, laddie."

But he shrank from the ordeal, crying, "No, no, keep her covered up!"

The little traitor seemed to be asleep, and so he ventured to say, eagerly, "It wouldn't not take long to carry all our things to another house, would it? Me and Shovel could near do it ourselves."

"And that's God's truth," the woman said, with a look round the room. "But what for should we do that?"

"Do you no see, mother?" he whispered excitedly. "Then you and me could slip away, and —and leave her — in the press."

The feeble smile with which his mother received this he interpreted thus, "Wherever we go'd to she would be there before us."

"The little besom!" he cried helplessly.

His mother saw that mischievous boys had been mounting him on his horse, which needed only one slap to make it go a mile; but she was a spiritless woman, and replied indifferently, "You're a funny litlin."

Presently a dry sob broke from her, and thinking the child was the cause, soft-hearted Tommy said, "It can't not be helped, mother; don't cry, mother, I'm fond on yer yet, mother; I — I took her away. I found another woman — but she would come."

"She's God's gift, man," his mother said, but she added, in a different tone, "Ay, but he hasna sent her keep."

"God's gift!" Tommy shuddered, but he said sourly, "I wish he would take her back. Do you wish that, too, mother?"

The weary woman almost said she did, but her arms — they gripped the baby as if frightened that he had sent for it. Jealous Tommy, suddenly deprived of his mother's hand, cried, "It's true what Shovel says, you don't not love me never again; you jest loves that little limmer!"

"Na, na," the mother answered, passionate at last, "she can never be to me what you hae been,

my laddie, for you came to me when my hame was in hell, and we tholed it thegither, you and me."

This bewildered though it comforted him. He thought his mother might be speaking about the room in which they had lived until six months ago, when his father was put into the black box, but when he asked her if this were so, she told him to sleep, for she was dog-tired. She always evaded him in this way when he questioned her about his past, but at times his mind would wander backwards unbidden to those distant days, and then he saw flitting dimly through them the elusive form of a child. He knew it was himself, and for moments he could see it clearly, but when he moved a step nearer it was not there. So does the child we once were play hide and seek with us among the mists of infancy, until one day he trips and falls into the daylight. Then we seize him, and with that touch we two are one. It is the birth of self-consciousness.

Hitherto he had slept at the back of his mother's bed, but to-night she could not have him there, the place being occupied, and rather sulkily he consented to lie crosswise at her feet, undressing by the feeble fire and taking care, as he got into bed, not to look at the usurper. His mother watched him furtively, and was relieved to read in his face that he had no recollection of ever having slept at the foot of a bed before. But soon

after he fell asleep he awoke, and was afraid to move lest his father should kick him. He opened his eyes stealthily, and this was neither the room nor the bed he had expected to see.

The floor was bare save for a sheepskin beside the bed. Tommy always stood on the sheepskin while he was dressing because it was warm to the feet, though risky, as your toes sometimes caught in knots in it. There was a deal table in the middle of the floor with some dirty crockery on it and a kettle that would leave a mark, but they had been left there by Shovel's old girl, for Mrs. Sandys usually kept her house clean. The chairs were of the commonest, and the press door would not remain shut unless you stuck a knife between its halves; but there was a gay blue wardrobe, spotted white where Tommy's mother had scraped off the mud that had once bespattered it during a lengthy sojourn at the door of a shop; and on the mantelpiece was a clock in a little brown and yellow house, and on the clock a Bible that had been in Thrums. But what Tommy was proudest of was his mother's kist, to which the chests of Londoners are not to be compared, though like it in appearance. On the inside of the lid of this kist was pasted, after a Thrums custom, something that his mother called her marriage lines, which she forced Shovel's mother to come up and look at one day, when that lady had made an innuendo

Tommy did not understand, and Shovel's mother had looked, and though she could not read, was convinced, knowing them by the shape.

Tommy lay at the foot of the bed looking at this room, which was his home now, and trying to think of the other one, and by and by the fire helped him by falling to ashes, when darkness came in, and packing the furniture in grotesque cloths, removed it piece by piece, all but the clock. Then the room took a new shape. The fireplace was over there instead of here, the torn yellow blind gave way to one made of spars of green wood, that were bunched up at one side, like a lady out for a walk. On a round table there was a beautiful blue cloth, with very few gravy marks, and here a man ate beef when a woman and a boy ate bread, and near the fire was the man's big soft chair, out of which you could pull hairs, just as if it were Shovel's sister.

Of this man who was his father he could get no hold. He could feel his presence, but never see him. Yet he had a face. It sometimes pressed Tommy's face against it in order to hurt him, which it could do, being all short needles at the chin.

Once in those days Tommy and his mother ran away and hid from some one. He did not know from whom nor for how long, though it was but for a week, and it left only two impressions on his mind,

the one that he often asked, "Is this starving now, mother?" the other that before turning a corner she always peered round it fearfully. Then they went back again to the man and he laughed when he saw them, but did not take his feet off the mantelpiece. There came a time when the man was always in bed, but still Tommy could not see his face. What he did see was the man's clothes lying on the large chair just as he had placed them there when he undressed for the last time. The black coat and worsted waistcoat which he could take off together were on the seat, and the light trousers hung over the side, the legs on the hearthrug, with the red socks still sticking in them: a man without a body.

But the boy had one vivid recollection, of how his mother received the news of his father's death. An old man with a white beard and gentle ways, who often came to give the invalid physic, was standing at the bedside, and Tommy and his mother were sitting on the fender. The old man came to her and said, "It is all over," and put her softly into the big chair. She covered her face with her hands, and he must have thought she was crying, for he tried to comfort her. But as soon as he was gone she rose, with such a queer face, and went on tiptoe to the bed, and looked intently at her husband, and then she clapped her hands joyously three times.

At last Tommy fell asleep with his mouth open, which is the most important thing that has been told of him as yet, and while he slept day came and restored the furniture that night had stolen. But when the boy woke he did not even notice the change; his brain traversed the hours it had lost since he lay down as quickly as you may put on a stopped clock, and with his first tick he was thinking of nothing but the deceiver in the back of the bed. He raised his head, but could only see that she had crawled under the coverlet to escape his wrath. His mother was asleep. Tommy sat up and peeped over the edge of the bed, then he let his eyes wander round the room; he was looking for the girl's clothes, but they were nowhere to be seen. It is distressing to have to tell what was in his mind was merely the recovery of his penny. Perhaps as they were Sunday clothes she had hung them up in the wardrobe? He slipped on to the floor and crossed to the wardrobe, but not even the muff could he find. Had she been tired and gone to bed in them? Very softly he crawled over his mother, and pulling the coverlet off the child's face, got the great shock of his childhood.

It was another one!

CHAPTER III

SHOWING HOW TOMMY WAS SUDDENLY TRANSFORMED INTO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN

It would have fared ill with Mrs. Sandys now, had her standoffishness to her neighbours been repaid in the same coin, but they were full of sympathy, especially Shovel's old girl, from whom she had often drawn back offensively on the stair, but who nevertheless waddled up several times a day with savory messes, explaining, when Mrs. Sandys sniffed, that it was not the tapiocar but merely the cup that smelt of gin. When Tommy returned the cups she noticed not only that they were suspiciously clean, but that minute particles of the mess were adhering to his nose and chin (perched there like shipwrecked mariners on a rock, just out of reach of the devouring element), and after this discovery she brought two cupfuls at a time. She was an Irishwoman who could have led the House of Commons, and in walking she seldom raised her carpet shoes from the ground, perhaps because of her weight, for she had an expansive figure that bulged in all directions, and there were always bits of her here and

there that she had forgotten to lace. Round the corner was a delightful eating-house, through whose window you were allowed to gaze at the great sweating dumplings, and Tommy thought Shovel's mother was rather like a dumpling that had not been a complete success. If he ever knew her name he forgot it. Shovel, who probably had another name also, called her his old girl or his old woman or his old lady, and it was a sight to see her chasing him across the street when she was in liquor, and boastful was Shovel of the way she could lay on, and he was partial to her too, and once when she was giving it to him pretty strong with the tongs, his father (who followed many professions, among them that of finding lost dogs) had struck her and told her to drop it, and then Shovel sauced his father for interfering, saying she should lick him as long as she blooming well liked, which made his father go for him with a dog-collar; and that was how Shovel lost his eye.

For reasons less unselfish than his old girl's Shovel also was willing to make up to Tommy at this humiliating time. It might be said of these two boys that Shovel knew everything but Tommy knew other things, and as the other things are best worth hearing of, Shovel liked to listen to them, even when they were about Thrums, as they usually were. The very first time Tommy told him

of the wondrous spot, Shovel had drawn a great breath, and said, thoughtfully:

"I allers knowed as there were sich a beauty place, but I did n't jest know its name."

"How could yer know?" Tommy asked jealously.

"I ain't sure," said Shovel, "p'raps I dreamed on it."

"That's it," Tommy cried. "I tell yer, everybody dreams on it!" and Tommy was right; everybody dreams of it, though not all call it Thrums.

On the whole, then, the coming of the kid, who turned out to be called Elspeth, did not ostracise Tommy, but he wished that he had let the other girl in, for he never doubted that her admittance would have kept this one out. He told neither his mother nor his friend of the other girl, fearing that his mother would be angry with him when she learned what she had missed, and that Shovel would crow over his blundering, but occasionally he took a side glance at the victorious infant, and a poorer affair, he thought, he had never set eyes on. Sometimes it was she who looked at him, and then her chuckle of triumph was hard to bear. As long as his mother was there, however, he endured in silence, but the first day she went out in a vain search for work (it is about as difficult to get

washing as to get into the Cabinet), he gave the infant a piece of his mind, poking up her head with a stick so that she was bound to listen:

"You thinks as it was clever on you, does yer? Oh, if I had been on the stair!

"You needn't not try to get round me. I likes the other one five times better; yes, three times better.

"Thievey, thievey, thief, that's her place you is lying in. What?

"If you puts out your tongue at me again—! What do yer say?

"She was twice bigger than you. You ain't got no hair, nor yet no teeth. You're the littlest I ever seed. Eh? Don't not speak then, sulks!"

Prudence had kept him away from the other girl, but he was feeling a great want: someone to applaud him. When we grow older we call it sympathy. How Reddy (as he called her because she had beautiful red-brown hair) had appreciated him! She had a way he liked of opening her eyes very wide when she looked at him. Oh, what a difference from that thing in the back of the bed!

Not the mere selfish desire to see her again. however, would take him in quest of Reddy. He was one of those superior characters, was Tommy, who got his pleasure in giving it, and therefore gave it. Now, Reddy was a worthy girl. In suspecting her of overreaching him he had maligned

her: she had taken what he offered, and been thankful. It was fitting that he should give her a treat: let her see him again.

His mother was at last re-engaged by her old employers, her supplanter having proved unsatisfactory, and as the work lay in a distant street, she usually took the kid with her, thus leaving no one to spy on Tommy's movements. Reddy's reward for not playing him false, however, did not reach her as soon as doubtless she would have liked, because the first two or three times he saw her she was walking with the lady of his choice, and of course he was not such a fool as to show himself. But he walked behind them and noted with satisfaction that the lady seemed to be reconciled to her lot and inclined to let bygones be bygones; when at length Reddy and her patron met, Tommy thought this a good sign too, that Ma-ma (as she would call the lady) had told her not to go farther away than the lamp-post, lest she should get lost again. So evidently she had got lost once already, and the lady had been sorry. He asked Reddy many shrewd questions about how Ma-ma treated her, and if she got the top of the Sunday egg and had the licking of the pan and wore flannel underneath and slept at the back; and the more he inquired, the more clearly he saw that he had got her one of the right kind.

Tommy arranged with her that she should al-

ways be on the outlook for him at the window, and he would come sometimes, and after that they met frequently, and she proved a credit to him, gurgling with mirth at his tales of Thrums, and pinching him when he had finished, to make sure that he was really made just like common human beings. He was a thin, pale boy, while she looked like a baby rose full blown in a night because her time was short; and his movements were sluggish, but if she was not walking she must be dancing, and sometimes when there were few people in the street, the little armful of delight that she was jumped up and down like a ball, while Tommy kept the time, singing "Thrummy, Thrummy, Thrum Thrum Thrummy." They must have seemed a quaint pair to the lady as she sat at her window watching them and beckoning to Tommy to come in.

One day he went in, but only because she had come up behind and taken his hand before he could run. Then did Tommy quake, for he knew from Reddy how the day after the mother-making episode, Ma-ma and she had sought in vain for his door, and he saw that the object had been to call down curses on his head. So that head was hanging limply now.

You think that Tommy is to be worsted at last, but don't be too sure; you just wait and see. Ma-ma and Reddy (who was clucking rather

heartlessly) first took him into a room prettier even than the one he had lived in long ago (but there was no bed in it), and then, because someone they were in search of was not there, into another room without a bed (where on earth did they sleep?) whose walls were lined with books. Never having seen rows of books before except on sale in the streets, Tommy at once looked about him for the barrow. The table was strewn with sheets of paper of the size that they roll a quarter of butter in, and it was an amazing thick table, a solid square of wood, save for a narrow lane down the centre for the man to put his legs in — if he had legs, which unfortunately there was reason to doubt. He was a formidable man, whose beard licked the table while he wrote, and he wore something like a brown blanket, with a rope tied round it at the middle. Even more uncanny than himself were three busts on a shelf, which Tommy took to be deaders, and he feared the blanket might blow open and show that the man also ended at the waist. But he did not, for presently he turned round to see who had come in (the seat of his chair turning with him in the most startling way), and then Tommy was relieved to notice two big feet far away at the end of him.

"This is the boy, dear," the lady said. "I had to bring him in by force."

Tommy raised his arm instinctively to protect

his face, this being the kind of man who could hit hard. But presently he was confused, and also, alas, leering a little. You may remember that Reddy had told him she must not go beyond the lamp-post, lest she should be lost again. She had given him no details of the adventure, but he learned now from Ma-ma and Papa (the man's name was Papa) that she had strayed when Ma-ma was in a shop and that some good kind boy had found her and brought her home; and what do you say to this, they thought Tommy was that boy! In his amazement he very nearly blurted out that he was the other boy, but just then the lady asked Papa if he had a shilling, and this abruptly closed Tommy's mouth. Ever afterwards he remembered Papa as the man that was not sure whether he had a shilling until he felt his pockets — a new kind of mortal to Tommy, who grabbed the shilling when it was offered to him, and then looked at Reddy imploringly, he was so afraid she would tell. But she behaved splendidly, and never even shook her head at him. After this, as hardly need be told, his one desire was to get out of the house with his shilling before they discovered their mistake, and it was well that they were unsuspicious people, for he was making strange hissing sounds in his throat, the result of trying hard to keep his sniggers under control.

There were many ways in which Tommy could

have disposed of his shilling. He might have been a good boy and returned it next day to Papa. He might have given Reddy half of it for not telling. It could have carried him over the winter. He might have stalked with it into the shop where the greasy puddings were and come rolling out hours afterwards. Some of these schemes did cross his little mind, but he decided to spend the whole shilling on a present to his mother, and it was to be something useful. He devoted much thought to what she was most in need of, and at last he bought her a colored picture of Lord Byron swimming the Hellespont.

He told her that he got his shilling from two toffs for playing with a little girl, and the explanation satisfied her; but she could have cried at the waste of the money, which would have been such a God-send to her. He cried altogether, however, at sight of her face, having expected it to look so pleased, and then she told him, with caresses, that the picture was the one thing she had been longing for ever since she came to London. How had he known this, she asked, and he clapped his hands gleefully, and said he just knowed when he saw it in the shop window.

"It was noble of you," she said, "to spend all your siller on me."

"Wasn't it, mother?" he crowed. "I'm thinking there ain't many as noble as I is!"

He did not say why he had been so good to her, but it was because she had written no letters to Thrums since the intrusion of Elspeth; a strange reason for a boy whose greatest glory at one time had been to sit on the fender and exultingly watch his mother write down words that would be read aloud in the wonderful place. She was a long time in writing a letter, but that only made the whole evening romantic, and he found an arduous employment in keeping his tongue wet in preparation for the licking of the stamp.

But she could not write to the Thrums folk now without telling them of Elspeth, who was at present sleeping the sleep of the shameless in the hollow of the bed, and so for his sake, Tommy thought, she meant to write no more. For his sake, mark you, not for her own. She had often told him that some day he should go to Thrums, but not with her; she would be far away from him then in a dark place she was awid to be lying in. Thus it seemed to Tommy that she denied herself the pleasure of writing to Thrums lest the sorry news of Elspeth's advent should spoil his reception when he went north.

So grateful Tommy gave her the picture, hoping that it would fill the void. But it did not. She put it on the mantelpiece so that she might just sit and look at it, she said, and he grinned at it from every part of the room, but when he re-

turned to her, he saw that she was neither looking at it nor thinking of it. She was looking straight before her, and sometimes her lips twitched, and then she drew them into her mouth to keep them still. It is a kind of dry weeping that sometimes comes to miserable ones when their minds stray into the happy past, and Tommy sat and watched her silently for a long time, never doubting that the cause of all her woe was that she could not write to Thrums.

He had seldom seen tears on his mother's face, but he saw one now. They had been reluctant to come for many a day, and this one formed itself beneath her eye and sat there like a blob of blood.

His own began to come more freely. But she needn't not expect him to tell her to write nor to say that he didn't care what Thrums thought of him so long as she was happy.

The tear rolled down his mother's thin cheek and fell on the grey shawl that had come from Thrums.

She did not hear her boy as he dragged a chair to the press and standing on it got something down from the top shelf. She had forgotten him, and she started when presently the pen was slipped into her hand and Tommy said, "You can do it, mother, I wants yer to do it, mother, I won't not greet, mother!"

When she saw what he wanted her to do she patted his face approvingly, but without realizing

the extent of his sacrifice. She knew that he had some maggot in his head that made him regard Elspeth as a sore on the family honour, but ascribing his views to jealousy she had never tried seriously to change them. Her main reason for sending no news to Thrums of late had been but the cost of the stamp, though she was also a little conscience-stricken at the kind of letters she wrote, and the sight of the materials lying ready for her proved sufficient to draw her to the table.

"Is it to your grandmother you is writing the letter?" Tommy asked, for her grandmother had brought Mrs. Sandys up and was her only surviving relative. This was all Tommy knew of his mother's life in Thrums, though she had told him much about other Thrums folk, and not till long afterwards did he see that there must be something queer about herself, which she was hiding from him.

This letter was not for her granny, however, and Tommy asked next, "Is it to Aaron Latta?" which so startled her that she dropped the pen.

"Whaur heard you that name?" she said sharply. "I never spoke it to you."

"I've heard you saying it when you was sleeping, mother."

"Did I say onything but the name? Quick, tell me."

"You said, 'Oh, Aaron Latta, oh, Aaron, little

did we think, Aaron,' and things like that. Are you angry with me, mother?"

"No," she said, relieved, but it was some time before the desire to write came back to her. Then she told him, "The letter is to a woman that was gey cruel to me," adding, with a complacent pursing of her lips, the curious remark, "That's the kind I like to write to best."

The pen went scrape, scrape, but Tommy did not weary, though he often sighed, because his mother would never read aloud to him what she wrote. The Thrums people never answered her letters, for the reason, she said, that those she wrote to could not write, which seemed to simple Tommy to be a sufficient explanation. So he had never heard the inside of a letter talking, though a postman lived in the house, and even Shovel's old girl got letters; once when her uncle died she got a telegram, which Shovel proudly wheeled up and down the street in a barrow, other blokes keeping guard at the side. To give a letter to a woman who had been cruel to you struck Tommy as the height of nobility.

"She'll be uplifted when she gets it!" he cried.

"She'll be mad when she gets it," answered his mother, without looking up.

This was the letter:—

My dear Esther,—I send you these few scrapes to let you see I have not forgot you, though my way is now grand by

yours. A spleet new black silk, Esther, being the second in a twelvemonth, as I'm a living woman. The other is no none tashed yet, but my gudeman fair insisted on buying a new one, for says he "Rich folk like us can afford to be mislaird, and nothing's ower braw for my bonny Jean." Tell Aaron Latta that. When I'm sailing in my silks, Esther, I sometimes picture you turning your wincey again, for I'se uphaud that's all the new frock you've ha'en the year. I dinna want to give you a scunner of your man, Esther, more by token they said if your mither had not took him in hand you would never have kent the colour of his nightcap, but when you are wraxing ower your kail-pot in a plot of heat, just picture me ringing the bell for my servant, and saying, with a wave of my hand, "Servant, lay the dinner." And ony bonny afternoon when your man is cleaning out stables and you're at the tub in a short gown, picture my man taking me and the children out a ride in a carriage, and I sair doubt your bairns was never in nothing more genteel than a coal cart. For bairns is yours, Esther, and children is mine, and that's a burn without a brig till't.

Deary me, Esther, what with one thing and another, namely buying a sofa, thirty shillings as I'm a sinner, I have forgot to tell you about my second, and it's a girl this time, my man saying he would like a change. We have christened her Elspeth after my grandmamma, and if my auld granny's aye living, you can tell her that's her. My man is terrible windy of his two beautiful children, but he says he would have been the happiest gentleman in London though he had just had me, and really his fondness for me, it cows, Esther, sitting aside me on the bed, two pounds without the blankets, about the time Elspeth was born, and feeding me with the fat of the land, namely, tapiocas and sherry wine. Tell Aaron Latta that.

I pity you from the bottom of my heart, Esther, for having to bide in Thrums, but you have never seen no better, your man having neither the siller nor the desire to take you jaunts, and I'm thinking that is just as well, for if you saw how the

like of me lives it might disgust you with your own bit house. I often laugh, Esther, to think that I was once like you, and looked upon Thrums as a bonny place. How is the old hole? My son makes grand sport of the onfortunate bairns as has to bide in Thrums, and I see him doing it the now to his favourite companion, which is a young gentleman of ladylike manners, as bides in our terrace. So no more at present, for my man is sitting ganting for my society, and I daresay yours is crying to you to darn his old socks. Mind and tell Aaron Latta.

This letter was posted next day by Tommy, with the assistance of Shovel, who seems to have been the young gentleman of ladylike manners referred to in the text.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF AN IDYLL

Tommy never saw Reddy again owing to a fright he got about this time, for which she was really to blame, though a woman who lived in his house was the instrument.

It is, perhaps, idle to attempt a summary of those who lived in that house, as one at least will be off, and another in his place, while we are giving them a line apiece. They were usually this kind who lived through the wall from Mrs. Sandys, but beneath her were the two rooms of Hinkey, the postman, and his lodger, the dreariest of middle-aged clerks except when telling wistfully of his ambition, which was to get out of the tea department into the coffee department, where there is an easier way of counting up the figures. Shovel and family were also on this floor, and in the rooms under them was a newly married couple. When the husband was away at his work, his wife would make some change in the furniture, taking the picture from this wall, for instance, and hanging

it on that wall, or wheeling the funny chair she had lain in before she could walk without a crutch, to the other side of the fireplace, or putting a skirt of yellow paper round the flower pot, and when he returned he always jumped back in wonder and exclaimed: "What an immense improvement!" These two were so fond of one another that Tommy asked them the reason, and they gave it by pointing to the chair with the wheels, which seemed to him to be no reason at all. What was this young husband's trade Tommy never knew, but he was the only prettily dressed man in the house, and he could be heard roaring in his sleep, "*And* the next article?" The meanest looking man lived next door to him. Every morning this man put on a clean white shirt, which sounds like a splendid beginning, but his other clothes were of the seediest, and he came and went shivering, raising his shoulders to his ears and spreading his hands over his chest as if anxious to hide his shirt rather than to display it. He and the happy husband were nicknamed Before and After, they were so like the pictorial advertisement of Man before and after he has tried Someone's lozenges. But it is rash to judge by outsides; Tommy and Shovel one day tracked Before to his place of business, and it proved to be a palatial eating-house, long, narrow, padded with red cushions; through the door they saw the once despised, now in beautiful black

clothes, the waistcoat a mere nothing, as if to give his shirt a chance at last, a towel over his arm, and to and fro he darted, saying "Yessirquitesosir" to the toffs on the seats, shouting "Twovegonebeef —onebeeronetartinahurry" to someone invisible, and pocketing twopences all day long, just like a lord. On the same floor as Before and After lived the large family of the little Pikes, who quarrelled at night for the middle place in the bed, and then chips of ceiling fell into the room below, tenant Jim Ricketts and parents, lodger the young woman we have been trying all these doors for. Her the police snapped up on a charge that made Tommy want to hide himself — child-desertion.

Shovel was the person best worth listening to on the subject (observe him, the centre of half a dozen boys), and at first he was for the defence, being a great stickler for the rights of mothers. But when the case against the girl leaked out, she need not look to him for help. The police had found the child in a basket down an area, and being knowing ones they pinched it to make it cry, and then they pretended to go away. Soon the mother, who was watching hard by to see if it fell into kind hands, stole to her baby to comfort it, "and just as she were a-kissing on it and blubbering the perlice copped her."

"The slut!" said disgusted Shovel, "what did she hang about for?" and in answer to a tremb-

ling question from Tommy he replied decisively, "Six months hard."

"Next case" was probably called immediately, but Tommy vanished, as if he had been sentenced and removed to the cells.

Never again, unless he wanted six months hard, must he go near Reddy's home, and so he now frequently accompanied his mother to the place where she worked. The little room had a funny fireplace called a stove, on which his mother made tea and the girls roasted chestnuts, and it had no other ordinary furniture except a long form. But the walls were mysterious. Three of them were covered with long white cloths, which went to the side when you tugged them, and then you could see on rails dozens of garments that looked like nightgowns. Beneath the form were scores of little shoes, most of them white or brown. In this house Tommy's mother spent eight hours daily, but not all of them in this room. When she arrived the first thing she did was to put Elspeth on the floor, because you cannot fall off a floor; then she went upstairs with a bucket and a broom to a large bare room, where she stayed so long that Tommy nearly forgot what she was like.

While his mother was upstairs Tommy would give Elspeth two or three shoes to eat to keep her quiet, and then he played with the others, pretending to be able to count them, arranging them in

designs, shooting them, swimming among them, saying "bow-wow" at them and then turning sharply to see who had said it. Soon Elspeth dropped her shoes and gazed in admiration at him, but more often than not she laughed in the wrong place, and then he said ironically: "Oh, in course I can't do nothin'; jest let's see you doing of it, then, cocky!"

By the time the girls began to arrive, singly or in twos and threes, his mother was back in the little room, making tea for herself or sewing bits of them that had been torn as they stepped out of a cab, or helping them to put on the nightgowns, or pretending to listen pleasantly to their chatter and hating them all the time. There was every kind of them, gorgeous ones and shabby ones, old tired ones and dashing young ones, but whether they were the Honorable Mrs. Something or only Jane Anything, they all came to that room for the same purpose: to get a little gown and a pair of shoes. Then they went upstairs and danced to a stout little lady, called the Sylph, who bobbed about like a ball at the end of a piece of elastic. What Tommy never forgot was that while they danced the Sylph kept saying, "One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four," which they did not seem to mind, but when she said, "One, two, three, four, *picture!*" they all stopped and stood motionless, though it might be with one foot as high as

their head and their arms stretched out toward the floor, as if they had suddenly seen a halfpenny there.

In the waiting-room, how they joked and pirouetted and gossiped, and hugged and scorned each other, and what slang they spoke and how pretty they often looked next moment, and how they denounced the one that had just gone out as a cat with whom you could not get in a word edgeways, and oh, how prompt they were to give a slice of their earnings to any "cat" who was hard up! But still, they said, she had talent, but no genius. How they pitied people without genius.

Have you ever tasted an encore or a reception? Tommy never had his teeth in one, but he heard much about them in that room, and concluded that they were some sort of cake. It was not the girls who danced in groups, but those who danced alone, that spoke of their encores and receptions, and sometimes they had got them last night, sometimes years ago. Two girls met in the room, one of whom had stolen the other's reception, and — but it was too dreadful to write about. Most of them carried newspaper cuttings in their purses and read them aloud to the others, who would not listen. Tommy listened, however, and as it was all about how one house had risen at the girls and they had brought another down, he thought they led the most adventurous lives.

Occasionally they sent him out to buy newspapers or chestnuts, and then he had to keep a sharp eye on the police lest they knew about Reddy. It was a point of honour with all the boys he knew to pretend that the policeman was after them. To gull the policeman into thinking all was well they blackened their faces and wore their jackets inside out; their occupation was a constant state of readiness to fly from him, and when he tramped out of sight, unconscious of their existence, they emerged from dark places and spoke in exultant whispers. Tommy had been proud to join them, but he now resented their going on in this way; he felt that he alone had the right to fly from the law. And once at least while he was flying something happened to him that he was to remember better, far better, than his mother's face.

What set him running on this occasion (he had been sent out to get one of the girls' shoes soled) was the grandest sight to be seen in London — an endless row of policemen walking in single file, all with the right leg in the air at the same time, then the left leg. Seeing at once that they were after him, Tommy ran, ran, ran until in turning a corner he found himself wedged between two legs. He was of just sufficient size to fill the aperture, but after a momentary lock he squeezed through, and they proved to be the gate into an enchanted land.

The magic began at once. "Dagont, you sacket!" cried some wizard.

A policeman's hand on his shoulder could not have taken the wind out of Tommy more quickly. In the act of starting a-running again he brought down his hind foot with a thud and stood stock still. Can any one wonder? It was the Thrums tongue, and this the first time he heard it except from his mother.

It was a dull day, and all the walls were dripping wet, this being the part of London where the fogs are kept. Many men and women were passing to and fro, and Tommy, with a wild exultation in his breast, peered up at the face of this one and that; but no, they were only ordinary people, and he played rub-a-dub with his feet on the pavement, so furious was he with them for moving on as if nothing had happened. Draw up, ye carters; pedestrians, stand still; London, silence for a moment, and let Tommy Sandys listen!

Being but a frail plant in the way of a flood, Tommy was rooted up and borne onward, but he did not feel the buffeting. In a passion of grief he dug his fists in his eyes, for the glory had been his for but a moment. It can be compared to nothing save the parcel (attached to a concealed string) which Shovel and he once placed on the stair for Billy Hankey to find, and then whipped away from him just as he had got it under his arm. But so near the crying, Tommy did not cry, for

even while the tears were rushing to his aid he tripped on the step of a shop, and immediately, as if that had rung the magic bell again, a voice, a woman's voice this time, said shrilly, "Threepence ha'penny, and them jimply as big as a bantam's! Na, na, but I'll gi'e you five bawbees."

Tommy sat down flop on the step, feeling queer in the head. Was it — was it — was it Thrums? He knew he had been running a long time.

The woman, or fairy, or whatever you choose to call her, came out of the shop and had to push Tommy aside to get past. Oh, what a sweet foot to be kicked by. At the time, he thought she was dressed not unlike the women of his own stair, but this defect in his vision he mended afterward, as you may hear. Of course, he rose and trotted by her side like a dog, looking up at her as if she were a cathedral; but she mistook his awe for impudence and sent him sprawling, with the words, "Tak' that, you glowering partan!"

Do you think Tommy resented this? On the contrary, he screamed from where he lay, "Say it again! say it again!"

She was gone, however, but only, as it were, to let a window open, from which came the cry, "Davit, have you seen my man?"

A male fairy roared back from some invisible place, "He has gone yont to Petey's wi' the dambrod."

"I'll dambrod him!" said the female fairy, and the window shut.

Tommy was now staggering like one intoxicated, but he had still some sense left him, and he walked up and down in front of this house, as if to take care of it. In the middle of the street some boys were very busy at a game, carts and lorries passing over them occasionally. They came to the pavement to play marbles, and then Tommy noticed that one of them wore what was probably a glengarry bonnet. Could he be a Thrums boy? At first he played in the stupid London way, but by and by he had to make a new ring, and he did it by whirling round on one foot. Tommy knew from his mother that it is only done in this way in Thrums. Oho! Oho!

By this time he was prancing round his discovery, saying, "I'm one, too — so am I — dagont, does yer hear? dagont!" which so alarmed the boy that he picked up his marble and fled, Tommy, of course, after him. Alas! he must have been some mischievous sprite, for he lured his pursuer back into London and then vanished, and Tommy, searching in vain for the enchanted street, found his own door instead.

His mother pooh-poohed his tale, though he described the street exactly as it struck him on reflection, and it bore a curious resemblance to the palace of Aladdin that Reddy had told him about,

leaving his imagination to fill in the details, which it promptly did, with a square, a town-house, some outside stairs, and an Auld Licht kirk. There was no such street, however, his mother assured him; he had been dreaming. But if this were so, why was she so anxious to make him promise never to look for the place again?

He did go in search of it again, daily for a time, always keeping a look-out for bow-legs, and the moment he saw them, he dived recklessly between, hoping to come out into fairyland on the other side. For though he had lost the street, he knew that this was the way in.

Shovel had never heard of the street, nor had Bob. But Bob gave him something that almost made him forget it for a time. Bob was his favourite among the dancing girls, and she — or should it be he? The odd thing about these girls was that a number of them were really boys — or at least were boys at Christmas-time, which seemed to Tommy to be even stranger than if they had been boys all the year round. A friend of Bob's remarked to her one day, "You are to be a girl next winter, ain't you, Bob?" and Bob shook her head scornfully.

"Do you see any green in my eye, my dear?" she inquired.

Her friend did not look, but Tommy looked, and there was none. He assured her of this so

earnestly that Bob fell in love with him on the spot, and chucked him under the chin, first with her thumb and then with her toe, which feat was duly reported to Shovel, who could do it by the end of the week.

Did Tommy, Bob wanted to know, still think her a mere woman?

No, he withdrew the charge, but — but — She was wearing her outdoor garments, and he pointed to them. "Why does yer wear them, then?" he demanded.

"For the matter of that," she replied, pointing at his frock, "why do you wear them?" Whereupon Tommy began to cry.

"I ain't not got no right ones," he blubbered. Harum-scarum Bob, who was a trump, had him in her motherly arms immediately, and the upshot of it was that a blue suit she had worn when she was Sam Something changed owners. Mrs. Sandys "made it up," and that is how Tommy got into trousers.

Many contingencies were considered in the making, but the suit would fit Tommy by and by if he grew, or it shrunk, and they did not pass each other in the night. When proud Tommy first put on his suit the most unexpected shyness overcame him, and having set off vaingloriously he stuck on the stair and wanted to hide. Shovel, who had been having an argument with his old

girl, came, all boastful bumps, to him, and Tommy just stood still with a self-conscious simper on his face. And Shovel, who could have damped him considerably, behaved in a most honorable manner, initiating him gravely into the higher life, much as you show the new member round your club.

It was very risky to go back to Reddy, whom he had not seen for many weeks; but in trousers! He could not help it. He only meant to walk up and down her street, so that she might see him from the window, and know that this splendid thing was he; but though he went several times into the street, Reddy never came to the window.

The reason he had to wait in vain at Reddy's door was that she was dead; she had been dead for quite a long time when Tommy came back to look for her. You mothers who have lost your babies, I should be a sorry knave were I to ask you to cry now over the death of another woman's child. Reddy had been lent to two people for a very little while, just as your babies were, and when the time was up she blew a kiss to them and ran gleefully back to God, just as your babies did. The gates of heaven are so easily found when we are little, and they are always standing open to let children wander in.

But though Reddy was gone away forever, mamma still lived in that house, and on a day she

opened the door to come out. Tommy was standing there — she saw him there waiting for Reddy. Dry-eyed this sorrowful woman had heard the sentence pronounced, dry-eyed she had followed the little coffin to its grave; tears had not come even when waking from illusive dreams she put out her hand in bed to a child who was not there; but when she saw Tommy waiting at the door for Reddy, who had been dead for a month, her bosom moved and she could cry again.

Those tears were sweet to her husband, and it was he who took Tommy on his knee in the room where the books were, and told him that there was no Reddy now. When Tommy knew that Reddy was a deader he cried bitterly, and the man said, very gently, "I am glad you were so fond of her."

"'Tain't that," Tommy answered with a knuckle in his eye, "'tain't that as makes me cry." He looked down at his trousers and in a fresh outburst of childish grief he wailed, "It's them!"

Papa did not understand, but the boy explained. "She can't not never see them now," he sobbed, "and I wants her to see them, and they has pockets!"

It had come to the man unexpectedly. He put Tommy down almost roughly, and raised his hand to his head as if he felt a sudden pain there.

But Tommy, you know, was only a little boy.

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL WITH TWO MOTHERS

Elspeth at last did something to win Tommy's respect; she fell ill of an ailment called in Thrums the croup. When Tommy first heard his mother call it croup, he thought she was merely humouring Elspeth, and that it was nothing more distinguished than London whooping-cough, but on learning that it was genuine croup, he began to survey the ambitious little creature with a new interest.

This was well for Elspeth, as she had now to spend most of the day at home with him, their mother, whose health was failing through frequent attacks of bronchitis, being no longer able to carry her through the streets. Of course Elspeth took to repaying his attentions by loving him, and he soon suspected it, and then gloomily admitted it to himself, but never to Shovel. Being but an Englishman, Shovel saw no reason why relatives should conceal their affection for each other, but he played on this Scottish weakness of Tommy's with cruel enjoyment

"She's fond on yer!" he would say severely.
"You's a liar."
"Gar long! I believe as you're fond on her!"
"You jest take care, Shovel."
"Ain't yer?"
"Na-o!"
"Will yer swear?"
"So I will swear."
"Let's hear yer."
"Dagont!"

So for a time the truth was kept hidden, and Shovel retired, casting aspersions, and offering to eat all the hair on Elspeth's head for a penny.

This hair was white at present, which made Tommy uneasy about her future, but on the whole he thought he might make something of her if she was only longer. Sometimes he stretched her on the floor, pulling her legs out straight, for she had a silly way of doubling them up, and then he measured her carefully with his mother's old boots. Her growth proved to be distressingly irregular, as one day she seemed to have grown an inch since last night, and then next day she had shrunk two inches.

After her day's work Mrs. Sandys was now so listless that, had not Tommy interfered, Elspeth would have been a backward child. Reddy had been able to walk from the first day, and so of course had he, but this little slow-coach's legs

wobbled at the joints, like the blade of a knife without a spring. The question of questions was How to keep her on end?

Tommy sat on the fender revolving this problem, his head resting on his hand, that favourite position of mighty intellects when about to be photographed. Elspeth lay on her stomach on the floor, gazing earnestly at him, as if she knew she was in his thoughts for some stupendous purpose. Thus the apple may have looked at Newton before it fell.

Hankey, the postman, compelled the flowers in his window to stand erect by tying them to sticks, so Tommy took two sticks from a bundle of firewood, and splicing Elspeth's legs to them, held her upright against the door with one hand. All he asked of her to-day was to remain in this position after he said "One, two, three, four, *picture!*" and withdrew his hand, but down she flopped every time, and he said, with scorn,

"You ain't got no genius: you has just talent."

But he had her in bed with the scratches nicely covered up before his mother came home.

He tried another plan with more success. Lost dogs, it may be remembered, had a habit of following Shovel's father, and he not only took the wanderers in, but taught them how to beg and shake hands and walk on two legs. Tommy had sometimes been present at these agreeable exer-

cises, and being an inventive boy he — But as Elspeth was a nice girl, let it suffice to pause here and add shyly, that in time she could walk.

He also taught her to speak, and if you need to be told with what luscious word he enticed her into language you are sentenced to re-read the first pages of his life.

"Thrums," he would say persuasively, "Thrums, Thrums. You opens your mouth like this, and shuts it like this, and that's it." Yet when he had coaxed her thus for many days, what does she do but break her long silence with the word "Tommy!" The recoil knocked her over.

Soon afterward she brought down a bigger bird. No Londoner can say "Auld licht," and Tommy had often crowed over Shovel's "Ol likt." When the testing of Elspeth could be deferred no longer, he eyed her with the look a hen gives the green egg on which she has been sitting twenty days, but Elspeth triumphed, saying the words modestly even, as if nothing inside her told her she had that day done something which would have baffled Shakespeare, not to speak of most of the gentlemen who sit for Scotch constituencies.

"Reddy couldn't say it!" Tommy cried exultantly, and from that great hour he had no more fears for Elspeth.

Next the alphabet knocked for admission; and entered first *M* and *P*, which had prominence in

the only poster visible from the window. Mrs. Sandys had taught Tommy his letters, but he had got into words by studying posters.

Elspeth being able now to make the perilous descent of the stairs, Tommy guided her through the streets (letting go hurriedly if Shovel hove in sight), and here she bagged new letters daily. With Catling's something, which is the best, she got into capital *C*s; *y*s are found easily when you know where to look for them (they hang on behind); *X*s are never found singly, but often three at a time; *Q* is so aristocratic that even Tommy had only heard of it; doubtless it was there, but indistinguishable among the masses like a celebrity in a crowd; on the other hand, big *A* and little *e* were so dirt cheap, that these two scholars passed them with something very like a sneer.

The printing-press is either the greatest blessing or the greatest curse of modern times, one sometimes forgets which. Elspeth's faith in it was absolute, and as it only spoke to her from placards, here was her religion, at the age of four:

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.
HAPPY ARE THEY WHO NEEDING KNOW THE
PAINLESS POROUS PLASTER.

Of religion, Tommy had said many fine things to her, embellishments on the simple doctrine taught him by his mother before the miseries of

this world made her indifferent to the next. But the meaning of "Pray without ceasing," Elspeth, who was God's child always, seemed to find out for herself, and it cured all her troubles. She prayed promptly for every one she saw doing wrong, including Shovel, who occasionally had words with Tommy on the subject, and she not only prayed for her mother, but proposed to Tommy that they should buy her a porous plaster. Mrs. Sandys had been down with bronchitis again.

Tommy raised the monetary difficulty.

Elspeth knew where there was some money, and it was her very own.

Tommy knew where there was money, and it was his very own.

Elspeth would not tell how much she had, and it was twopence halfpenny.

Neither would Tommy tell, and it was twopence.

Tommy would get a surprise on his birthday.

So would Elspeth get a surprise on her birthday.

Elspeth would not tell what the surprise was to be, and it was to be a gun.

Tommy also must remain mute, and it was to be a box of dominoes.

Elspeth did not want dominoes.

Tommy knew that, but he wanted them.

Elspeth discovered that guns cost fourpence, and

dominoes threepence halfpenny; it seemed to her, therefore, that Tommy was defrauding her of a halfpenny.

Tommy liked her cheek. You got the dominoes for threepence halfpenny, but the price on the box is fivepence, so that Elspeth would really owe him a penny.

This led to an agonizing scene in which Elspeth wept while Tommy told her sternly about Reddy. It had become his custom to tell the tale of Reddy when Elspeth was obstreperous.

Then followed a scene in which Tommy called himself a scoundrel for frightening his dear Elspeth, and swore that he loved none but her. Result: reconciliation, and agreed, that instead of a gun and dominoes, they should buy a porous plaster. You know the shops where the plasters are to be obtained by great coloured bottles in their windows, and, as it was advisable to find the very best shop, Tommy and Elspeth in their wanderings came under the influence of the bottles, red, yellow, green, and blue, and colour entered into their lives, giving them many delicious thrills. These bottles are the first poem known to the London child, and you chemists who are beginning to do without them in your windows should be told that it is a shame.

In the glamour, then, of the romantic bottles walked Tommy and Elspeth hand in hand, meet-

ing so many novelties that they might have spared a tear for the unfortunate children who sit in nurseries surrounded by all they ask for, and if the adventures of these two frequently ended in the middle, they had probably begun another while the sailor-suit boy was still holding up his leg to let the nurse put on his little sock. While they wandered, they drew near unwittingly to the enchanted street, to which the bottles are a coloured way, and at last they were in it, but Tommy recognized it not; he did not even feel that he was near it, for there were no outside stairs, no fairies strolling about, it was a short street as shabby as his own.

But someone had shouted "Dinna haver, lassie; you're blethering!"

Tommy whispered to Elspeth, "Be still; don't speak," and he gripped her hand tighter and stared at the speaker. He was a boy of ten, dressed like a Londoner, and his companion had disappeared. Tommy never doubting but that he was the sprite of long ago, gripped him by the sleeve. All the savings of Elspeth and himself were in his pocket, and yielding to impulse, as was his way, he thrust the fourpence halfpenny into James Gloag's hand. The new millionaire gaped, but not at his patron, for the why and wherefore of this gift were trifles to James beside the tremendous fact that he had fourpence halfpenny. "Almichty me!" he cried

and bolted. Presently he returned, having deposited his money in a safe place, and his first remark was perhaps the meanest on record. He held out his hand and said greedily, "Have you ony mair?"

This, you feel certain, must have been the most important event of that evening, but strange to say, it was not. Before Tommy could answer James's question, a woman in a shawl had pounced upon him and hurried him and Elspeth out of the street. She had been standing at a corner looking wistfully at the window blinds behind which folk from Thrums passed to and fro, hiding her face from people in the street, but gazing eagerly after them. It was Tommy's mother, whose first free act on coming to London had been to find out that street, and many a time since then she had skulked through it or watched it from dark places, never daring to disclose herself, but sometimes recognizing familiar faces, sometimes hearing a few words in the old tongue that is harsh and ungracious to you, but was so sweet to her, and bearing them away with her beneath her shawl as if they were something warm to lay over her cold heart.

For a time she upbraided Tommy passionately for not keeping away from this street, but soon her hunger for news of Thrums overcame her prudence, and she consented to let him go back if he prom-

ised never to tell that his mother came from Thrums. "And if onybody wants to ken your name, say it's Tommy, but dinna let on that it's Tommy Sandys."

"Elspeth," Tommy whispered that night, "I'm near sure there's something queer about my mother and me and you." But he did not trouble himself with wondering what the something queer might be, so engrossed was he in the new and exciting life that had suddenly opened to him.

CHAPTER VI

THE ENCHANTED STREET

In Thrums Street, as it ought to have been called, herded at least one-half of the Thrums folk in London, and they formed a colony, of which the grocer at the corner sometimes said wrathfully that not a member would give sixpence for anything except Bibles or whisky. In the streets one could only tell they were not Londoners by their walk, the flagstones having no grip for their feet, or, if they had come south late in life, by their backs, which they carried at the angle on which webs are most easily supported. When mixing with the world they talked the English tongue, which came out of them as broad as if it had been squeezed through a mangle, but when the day's work was done, it was only a few of the giddier striplings that remained Londoners. For the majority there was no raking the streets after diversion, they spent the hour or two before bed-time in reproducing the life of Thrums. Few of them knew much of London except the nearest way between this street and their work, and their most interesting visitor

was a Presbyterian minister, most of whose congregation lived in much more fashionable parts, but they were almost exclusively servant girls, and when descending area-steps to visit them he had been challenged often and jocularly by policemen, which perhaps was what gave him a subdued and furtive appearance.

The rooms were furnished mainly with articles bought in London, but these became as like Thrums dressers and seats as their owners could make them, old Petey, for instance, cutting the back off a chair because he felt most at home on stools. Drawers were used as baking-boards, pails turned into salt-buckets, floors were sanded and hearthstones ca'med, and the popular supper consisted of porter, hot water, and soaked bread, after every spoonful of which they groaned pleasantly, and stretched their legs. Sometimes they played at the dambrod, but more often they pulled down the blinds on London and talked of Thrums in their mother tongue. Nevertheless few of them wanted to return to it, and their favourite joke was the case of James Gloag's father, who being homesick flung up his situation and took train for Thrums, but he was back in London in three weeks.

Tommy soon had the entry to these homes, and his first news of the inmates was unexpected. It was that they were always sleeping. In broad

daylight he had seen Thrums men asleep on beds, and he was somewhat ashamed of them until he heard the excuse. A number of the men from Thrums were bakers, the first emigrant of this trade having drawn others after him, and they slept great part of the day to be able to work all night in a cellar, making nice rolls for rich people. Baker Lumsden, who became a friend of Tommy, had got his place in the cellar when his brother died, and the brother had succeeded Matthew Croall when he died.

They die very soon, Tommy learned from Lumsden, generally when they are eight and thirty. Lumsden was thirty-six, and when he died his nephew was to get the place. The wages are good.

Then there were several masons, one of whom, like the first baker, had found work for all the others, and there were men who had drifted into trades strange to their birthplace, and there was usually one at least who had come to London to "better himself" and had not done it as yet. The family Tommy liked best was the Whamonds, and especially he liked old Petey and young Petey Whamond. They were a large family of women and men, all of whom earned their living in other streets, except the old man, who kept house and was a famous knitter of stockings, as probably his father had been before him. He was a great one, too, at telling what they would be doing at that

moment in Thrums, every corner of which was as familiar to him as the ins and outs of the family hose. Young Petey got fourteen shillings a week from a hatter, and one of his duties was to carry as many as twenty band-boxes at a time through fashionable streets; it is a matter for elation that dukes and statesmen had often to take the curb-stone, because young Petey was coming. Nevertheless young Petey was not satisfied, and never would be (such is the Thrums nature) until he became a salesman in the shop to which he acted at present as fetch and carry, and he used to tell Tommy that this position would be his as soon as he could sneer sufficiently at the old hats. When gentlemen come into the shop and buy a new hat, he explained, they put it on, meaning to tell you to send the old one to their address, and the art of being a fashionable hatter lies in this: you must be able to curl your lips so contemptuously at the old hat that they tell you guiltily to keep it, as they have no further use for it. Then they retire ashamed of their want of moral courage and you have made an extra half-guinea.

"But I aye snort," young Petey admitted, "and it should be done without a sound." When he graduated, he was to marry Martha Spens, who was waiting for him at Tillyloss. There was a London seamstress whom he preferred, and she was willing, but it is safest to stick to Thrums.

When Tommy was among his new friends a Scotch word or phrase often escaped his lips, but old Petey and the others thought he had picked it up from them, and would have been content to accept him as a London waif who lived somewhere round the corner. To trick people so simply, however, is not agreeable to an artist, and he told them his name was Tommy Shovel, and that his old girl walloped him, and his father found dogs, all which inventions Thrums Street accepted as true. What is much more noteworthy is that, as he gave them birth, Tommy half believed them also, being already the best kind of actor.

Not all the talking was done by Tommy when he came home with news, for he seldom mentioned a Thrums name, of which his mother could not tell him something more. But sometimes she did not choose to tell, as when he announced that a certain Elspeth Lindsay, of the Marywellbrae, was dead. After this she ceased to listen, for old Elspeth had been her grandmother, and she had now no kin in Thrums.

"Tell me about the Painted Lady," Tommy said to her. "Is it true she's a witch?" But Mrs. Sandys had never heard of any woman so called; the Painted Lady must have gone to Thrums after her time.

"There ain't no witches now," said Elspeth tremulously; Shovel's mother had told her so.

"Not in London," replied Tommy with contempt; and this is all that was said of the Painted Lady then. It is the first mention of her in these pages.

The people Mrs. Sandys wanted to hear of chiefly were Aaron Latta and Jean Myles, and soon Tommy brought news of them, but at the same time he had heard of the Den, and he said first:

"Oh, mother, I thought as you had told me about all the beauty places in Thrums, and you ain't never told me about the Den."

His mother heaved a quick breath. "It's the only place I hinna telled you o'," she said.

"Had you forgot it, mother?"

Forgot the Den? Ah, no, Tommy, your mother had not forgotten the Den.

"And, listen, Elspeth, in the Den there's a bonny spring of water called the Cuttle Well. Had you forgot the Cuttle Well, mother?"

No, no; when Jean Myles forgot the names of her children she would still remember the Cuttle Well. Regardless now of the whispering between Tommy and Elspeth, she sat long over the fire, and it is not difficult to fathom her thoughts. They were of the Den and the Cuttle Well.

Into the life of every man, and no woman, there comes a moment when he learns suddenly that he is held eligible for marriage. A girl gives him the jag, and it brings out the perspiration. Of the

issue elsewhere of this stab with a bodkin let others speak; in Thrums its commonest effect is to make the callant's body take a right angle to his legs, for he has been touched in the fifth button, and he backs away broken-winded. By and by, however, he is at his work — among the turnip-shoots, say — guffawing and clapping his corduroys, with pauses for uneasy meditation, and there he ripens with the swedes, so that by the back-end of the year he has discovered, and exults to know, that the reward of manhood is neither more nor less than this sensation at the ribs. Soon thereafter, or at worst, sooner or later (for by holding out he only puts the women's dander up), he is led captive to the Cuttle Well. This well has the reputation of being the place where it is most easily said.

The wooded ravine called the Den is in Thrums rather than on its western edge, but is so craftily hidden away that when within a stone's throw you may give up the search for it; it is also so deep that larks rise from the bottom and carol overhead, thinking themselves high in the heavens before they are on a level with Nether Drumley's farmland. In shape it is almost a semicircle, but its size depends on you and the maid. If she be with you, the Den is so large that you must rest here and there; if you are after her boldly, you can dash to the Cuttle Well, which was the trysting-place, in the time a stout man takes to lace

his boots; if you are of those self-conscious ones who look behind to see whether jeering blades are following, you may crouch and wriggle your way onward and not be with her in half an hour.

Old Petey had told Tommy that, on the whole, the greatest pleasure in life on a Saturday evening is to put your back against a stile that leads into the Den and rally the sweethearts as they go by. The lads, when they see you, want to go round by the other stile, but the lasses like it, and often the sport ends spiritedly with their giving you a clout on the head.

Through the Den runs a tiny burn, and by its side is a pink path, dyed this pretty colour, perhaps, by the blushes the ladies leave behind them. The burn as it passes the Cuttle Well, which stands higher and just out of sight, leaps in vain to see who is making that cooing noise, and the well, taking the spray for kisses, laughs all day at Romeo, who cannot get up. Well is a name it must have given itself, for it is only a spring in the bottom of a basinful of water, where it makes about as much stir in the world as a minnow jumping at a fly. They say that if a boy, by making a bowl of his hands, should suddenly carry off all the water, a quick girl could thread her needle at the spring. But it is a spring that will not wait a moment.

Men who have been lads in Thrums sometimes

go back to it from London or from across the seas, to look again at some battered little house and feel the blasts of their bairnhood playing through the old wynds, and they may take with them a foreign wife. They show her everything, except the Cuttle Well; they often go there alone. The well is sacred to the memory of first love. You may walk from the well to the round cemetery in ten minutes. It is a common walk for those who go back.

First love is but a boy and girl playing at the Cuttle Well with a bird's egg. They blow it on one summer evening in the long grass, and on the next it is borne away on a coarse laugh, or it breaks beneath the burden of a tear. And yet — I once saw an aged woman, a widow of many years, cry softly at mention of the Cuttle Well. "John was a good man to you," I said, for John had been her husband. "He was a leal man to me," she answered with wistful eyes, "ay, he was a leal man to me — but it wasna John I was thinking o'. You dinna ken what makes me greet so sair," she added, presently, and though I thought I knew now I was wrong. "It's because I canna mind his name," she said.

So the Cuttle Well has its sad memories and its bright ones, and many of the bright memories have become sad with age, as so often happens to beautiful things, but the most mournful of all is the

story of Aaron Latta and Jean Myles. Beside the well there stood for long a great pink stone, called the Shoaging Stone, because it could be rocked like a cradle, and on it lovers used to cut their names. Often Aaron Latta and Jean Myles sat together on the Shoaging Stone, and then there came a time when it bore these words, cut by Aaron Latta:

HERE LIES THE MANHOOD OF AARON LATTA,
A FOND SON, A FAITHFUL FRIEND AND A TRUE LOVER,
WHO VIOLATED THE FEELINGS OF SEX ON THIS
SPOT, AND IS NOW THE SCUNNER OF GOD AND MAN.

Tommy's mother now heard these words for the first time, Aaron having cut them on the stone after she left Thrums, and her head sank at each line, as if someone had struck four blows at her.

The stone was no longer at the Cuttle Well. As the easiest way of obliterating the words, the minister had ordered it to be broken, and of the pieces another mason had made stands for watches, one of which was now in Thrums Street.

"Aaron Latta ain't a mason now," Tommy rattled on: "he is a warper, because he can warp in his own house without looking on mankind or speaking to mankind. Auld Petey said he minded the day when Aaron Latta was a merry loon, and then Andrew McVittie said, 'God behears, to

think that Aaron Latta was ever a merry man!' and Baker Lumsden said, 'Curse her!'"

His mother shrank in her chair, but said nothing, and Tommy explained: "It was Jean Myles he was cursing; did you ken her, mother? she ruined Aaron Latta's life."

"Ay, and wha ruined Jean Myles's life?" his mother cried passionately.

Tommy did not know, but he thought that young Petey might know, for young Petey had said: "If I had been Jean Myles I would have spat in Aaron's face rather than marry him."

Mrs. Sandys seemed pleased to hear this.

"They wouldna tell me what it were she did," Tommy went on; "they said it was ower ugly a story, but she were a bad one, for they stoned her out of Thrums. I dinna know where she is now, but she were stoned out of Thrums!"

"No alane?"

"There was a man with her, and his name was — it was ——"

His mother clasped her hands nervously while Tommy tried to remember the name. "His name was Magerful Tam," he said at length.

"Ay," said his mother, knitting her teeth, "that was his name."

"I dinna mind any more," Tommy concluded. "Yes, I mind they aye called Aaron Latta 'Poor Aaron Latta.'"

"Did they? I warrant, though, there wasna one as said 'Poor Jean Myles'?"

She began the question in a hard voice, but as she said "Poor Jean Myles," something caught in her throat, and she sobbed, painful dry sobs.

"How could they pity her when she were such a bad one?" Tommy answered briskly.

"Is there none to pity bad ones?" said his sorrowful mother.

Elspeth plucked her by the skirt. "There's God, ain't there?" she said, inquiringly, and getting no answer she flopped upon her knees, to say a babyish prayer that would sound comic to anybody except to Him to whom it was addressed.

"You ain't praying for a woman as was a disgrace to Thrums!" Tommy cried, jealously, and he was about to raise her by force, when his mother stayed his hand.

"Let her alane," she said, with a twitching mouth and filmy eyes. "Let her alane. Let my bairn pray for Jean Myles."

CHAPTER VII

COMIC OVERTURE TO A TRAGEDY

"JEAN MYLES bides in London" was the next remarkable news brought by Tommy from Thrums Street. "And that ain't all, Magerful Tam is her man; and that ain't all, she has a laddie called Tommy; and that ain't all, Petey and the rest has never seen her in London, but she writes letters to Thrums folks and they writes to Petey and tells him what she said. That ain't all neither, they canna find out what street she bides in, but it's on the bonny side of London, and it's grand, and she wears silk clothes, and her Tommy has velvet trousers, and they have a servant as calls him 'sir.' Oh, I would just like to kick him! They often looks for her in the grand streets, but they're angry at her getting on so well, and Martha Scrymgeour said it were enough to make good women like her stop going reg'lar to the kirk."

"Martha said that!" exclaimed his mother, highly pleased. "Heard you anything of a woman called Esther Auld? Her man does the orra work at the Tappit Hen public in Thrums."

"He's head man at the Tappit Hen public

now," answered Tommy; "and she wishes she could find out where Jean Myles bides, so as she could write and tell her that she is grand too, and has six hair-bottomed chairs."

"She'll never get the satisfaction," said his mother triumphantly. "Tell me more about her."

"She has a laddie called Francie, and he has yellow curls, and she nearly greets because she canna tell Jean Myles that he goes to a school for the children of gentlemen only. She is so mad when she gets a letter from Jean Myles that she takes to her bed."

"Yea, yea!" said Mrs. Sandys cheerily.

"But they think Jean Myles has been brought low at last," continued Tommy, "because she hasna wrote for a long time to Thrums, and Esther Auld said that if she knowed for certain as Jean Myles had been brought low, she would put a threepenny bit in the kirk plate."

"I'm glad you've telled me that, laddie," said Mrs. Sandys, and next day, unknown to her children, she wrote another letter. She knew she ran a risk of discovery, yet it was probable that Tommy would only hear her referred to in Thrums Street by her maiden name, which he had never heard from her, and as for her husband he had been Magerful Tam to everyone. The risk was great, but the pleasure ——

Unsuspicious Tommy soon had news of another letter from Jean Myles, which had sent Esther Auld to bed again.

"Instead of being brought low," he announced, "Jean Myles is grander than ever. Her Tommy has a governess."

"That would be a doush of water in Esther's face," his mother said, smiling.

"She wrote to Martha Scrymgeour," said Tommy, "that it ain't no pleasure to her now to boast as her laddie is at a school for gentlemen's children only. But what made her maddest was a bit in Jean Myles's letter about chairs. Jean Myles has give all her hair-bottomed chairs to a poor woman and buyed a new kind, because hair-bottomed ones ain't fashionable now. So Esther Auld can't not bear the sight of her chairs now, though she were windy of them till the letter went to Thrums."

"Poor Esther!" said Mrs. Sandys gaily.

"Oh, and I forgot this, mother. Jean Myles's reason for not telling where she bides in London is that she's so grand that she thinks if auld Petey and the rest knowed where the place was they would visit her and boast as they was her friends. Auld Petey stamped wi' rage when he heard that, and Martha Scrymgeour said, 'Oh, the pridefu' limmer!'"

"Ay, Martha," muttered Mrs. Sandys, "you and Jean Myles is evens now."

But the passage that had made them all wince the most was one giving Jean's reasons for making no calls in Thrums Street. "You can break it to Martha Scrymgeour's father and mither," the letter said, "and to Petey Whamond's sisters and the rest as has friends in London, that I have seen no Thrums faces here, the low part where they bide not being for the like of me to file my feet in. Forby that, I could not let my son mix with their bairns for fear they should teach him the vulgar Thrums words and clarty his blue-velvet suit. I'm thinking you have to dress your laddie in corduroy, Esther, but you see that would not do for mine. So no more at present, and we all join in compliments, and my little velvets says he wishes I would send some of his toys to your little corduroys. And so maybe I will, Esther, if you'll tell Aaron Latta how rich and happy I am, and if you're feared to say it to his face, tell it to the roaring farmer of Double Dykes, and he'll pass it on."

"Did you ever hear of such a woman?" Tommy said indignantly, when he had repeated as much of this insult to Thrums as he could remember.

But it was information his mother wanted.

"What said they to that bit?" she asked.

At first, it appears, they limited their comments to "Losh, losh," "keeps a'," "it cows," "my certie," "ay, ay," "sal, tal," "dagont" (the meaning of which

is obvious). But by and by they recovered their breath, and then Baker Lumsden said wonderingly:

"Wha that was at her marriage could have thought it would turn out so weel? It was an eerie marriage that, Petey!"

"Ay, man, you may say so," old Petey answered. "I was there; I was one o' them as went in ahint Aaron Latta, and I'm no' likely to forget it."

"I wasna there," said the baker, "but I was standing at the door, and I saw the hearse drive up."

"What did they mean, mother?" Tommy asked, but she shuddered and replied, evasively, "Did Martha Scrymgeour say anything?"

"She said such a lot," he had to confess, "that I dinna mind none on it. But I mind what her father in Thrums wrote to her; he wrote to her that if she saw a carriage go by, she was to keep her eyes on the ground, for likely as not Jean Myles would be in it, and she thought as they was all dirt beneath her feet. But Kirsty Ross — who is she?"

"She's Martha's mother. What about her?"

"She wrote at the end of the letter that Martha was to hang on ahint the carriage and find out where Jean Myles bides."

"Laddie, that was like Kirsty! Heard you what the roaring farmer o' Double Dykes said?"

No, Tommy had not heard him mentioned.

And indeed the roaring farmer of Double Dykes had said nothing. He was already lying very quiet on the south side of the cemetery.

Tommy's mother's next question cost her a painful effort. "Did you hear," she asked, "whether they telled Aaron Latta about the letter?"

"Yes, they telled him," Tommy replied, "and he said a queer thing; he said, 'Jean Myles is dead, I was at her coffining.' That's what he aye says when they tell him there's another letter. I wonder what he means, mother?"

"I wonder!" she echoed, faintly. The only pleasure left her was to raise the envy of those who had hooted her from Thrums, but she paid a price for it. Many a stab she had got from the unwitting Tommy as he repeated the gossip of his new friends, and she only won their envy at the cost of their increased ill-will. They thought she was lording it in London, and so they were merciless; had they known how poor she was and how ill, they would have forgotten everything save that she was a Thrummy like themselves, and there were few but would have shared their all with her. But she did not believe this, and therefore you may pity her, for the hour was drawing near, and she knew it, when she must appeal to some one for her children's sake, not for her own.

No, not for her own. When Tommy was wan-

dering the pretty parts of London with James Gloag and other boys from Thrums Street in search of Jean Myles, whom they were to know by her carriage and her silk dress and her son in blue velvet, his mother was in bed with bronchitis in the wretched room we know of, or creeping to the dancing school, coughing all the way.

Some of the fits of coughing were very near being her last, but she wrestled with her trouble, seeming at times to stifle it, and then for weeks she managed to go to her work, which was still hers, because Shovel's old girl did it for her when the bronchitis would not be defied. Shovel's old slattern gave this service unasked and without payment; if she was thanked it was ungraciously, but she continued to do all she could when there was need; she smelled of gin, but she continued to do all she could.

The wardrobe had been put upon its back on the floor, and so converted into a bed for Tommy and Elspeth, who were sometimes wakened in the night by a loud noise, which alarmed them until they learned that it was only the man in the next room knocking angrily on the wall because their mother's cough kept him from sleeping.

Tommy knew what death was now, and Elspeth knew its name, and both were vaguely aware that it was looking for their mother; but if she could only hold out till Hogmanay, Tommy said,

they would fleg it out of the house. Hogmanay is the mighty winter festival of Thrums, and when it came round these two were to give their mother a present that would make her strong. It was not to be a porous plaster. Tommy knew now of something better than that.

"And I knows too!" Elspeth gurgled, "and I has threepence a'ready, I has."

"Whisht!" said Tommy in an agony of dread, "she hears you, and she'll guess. We ain't speaking of nothing to give to you at Hogmanay," he said to his mother with great cunning. Then he winked at Elspeth and said, with his hand over his mouth, "I hinna twopence!" and Elspeth, about to cry in fright, "Have you spended it?" saw the joke and crowed instead, "Nor yet has I threepence!"

They smirked together, until Tommy saw a change come over Elspeth's face, which made him run her outside the door.

"You was a-going to pray!" he said, severely.

"'Cos it was a lie, Tommy. I does have threepence."

"Well, you ain't a-going to get praying about it. She would hear yer."

"I would do it low, Tommy."

"She would see yer."

"Oh, Tommy, let me. God is angry with me."

Tommy looked down the stair, and no one was

in sight. "I'll let yer pray here," he whispered, "and you can say I have twopence. But be quick, and do it standing."

Perhaps Mrs. Sandys had been thinking that when Hogmanay came her children might have no mother to bring presents to, for on their return to the room her eyes followed them wofully, and a shudder of apprehension shook her torn frame. Tommy gave Elspeth a look that meant "I'm sure there's something queer about her."

There was also something queer about himself, which at this time had the strangest gallop. It began one day with a series of morning calls from Shovel, who suddenly popped his head over the top of the door (he was standing on the handle), roared "Roastbeef!" in the manner of a railway porter announcing the name of a station, and then at once withdrew.

He returned presently to say that vain must be all attempts to wheedle his secret from him, and yet again to ask irritably why Tommy was not coming out to hear all about it. Then did Tommy desert Elspeth, and on the stair Shovel showed him a yellow card with this printed on it: "S. R. J. C.—Supper Ticket;" and written beneath, in a lady's hand: "Admit Joseph Salt." The letters, Shovel explained, meant Society for the somethink of Juvenile Criminals, and the toffs what ran it got hold of you when you came out of quod. Then

if you was willing to repent they wrote down your name and the place what you lived at in a book, and one of them came to see yer and give yer a ticket for the blow-out night. This was blow-out night, and that were Shovel's ticket. He had bought it from Hump Salt for fourpence. What you get at the blow-out was roast beef, plum-duff, and an orange; but when Hump saw the fourpence he could not wait.

A favor was asked of Tommy. Shovel had been told by Hump that it was the custom of the toffs to sit beside you and question you about your crimes, and lacking the imagination that made Tommy such an ornament to the house, the chances were that he would flounder in his answers and be ejected. Hump had pointed this out to him after pocketing the fourpence. Would Tommy, therefore, make up things for him to say; reward, the orange.

This was a proud moment for Tommy, as Shovel's knowledge of crime was much more extensive than his own, though they had both studied it in the pictures of a lively newspaper subscribed to by Shovel, senior. He became patronizing at once and rejected the orange as insufficient.

Then suppose, after he got into the hall, Shovel dropped his ticket out at the window; Tommy could pick it up, and then it would admit him also.

Tommy liked this, but foresaw a danger: the ticket might be taken from Shovel at the door, just as they took them from you at that singing thing in the church he had attended with young Petey.

So help Shovel's davy, there was no fear of this. They were superior toffs, what trusted to your honour.

Would Shovel swear to this?

He would.

But would he swear dagont?

He swore dagont; and then Tommy had him. As he was so sure of it, he could not object to Tommy's being the one who dropped the ticket out at the window?

Shovel did object for a time, but after a wrangle he gave up the ticket, intending to take it from Tommy when primed with the necessary tale. So they parted until evening, and Tommy returned to Elspeth, secretive but elated. For the rest of the day he was in thought, now waggling his head smugly over some dark, unutterable design and again looking a little scared. In growing alarm she watched his face, and at last she slipped upon her knees, but he had her up at once and said, reproachfully:

"It were me as teached yer to pray, and now yer prays for me! That's fine treatment!"

Nevertheless, after his mother's return, just be-

fore he stole out to join Shovel, he took Elspeth aside and whispered to her, nervously:

"You can pray for me if you like, for, oh, Elspeth, I'm thinking as I'll need it sore!" And sore he needed it before the night was out.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOY WITH TWO MOTHERS

"I LOVE my dear father and my dear mother and all the dear little kids at 'ome. You are a kind laidy or gentleman. I love yer. I will never do it again, so help me bob. Amen."

This was what Shovel muttered to himself again and again as the two boys made their way across the lamplit Hungerford Bridge, and Tommy asked him what it meant.

"My old gal learned me that; she's deep," Shovel said, wiping the words off his mouth with his sleeve.

"But you got no kids at 'ome!" remonstrated Tommy. (Ameliar was now in service.)

Shovel turned on him with the fury of a mother protecting her young. "Don't you try for to knock none on it out," he cried, and again fell a-mumbling.

Said Tommy, scornfully: "If you says it all out at one bang you'll be done at the start."

Shovel sighed.

"And you should blubber when yer says it," added Tommy, who could laugh or cry merely

because other people were laughing or crying, or even with less reason, and so naturally that he found it more difficult to stop than to begin. Shovel was the taller by half a head, and irresistible with his fists, but to-night Tommy was master.

"You jest stick to me, Shovel," he said airily. "Keep a grip on my hand, same as if yer was Elspeth."

"But what was we copped for, Tommy?" entreated humble Shovel.

Tommy asked him if he knew what a butler was, and Shovel remembered, confusedly, that there had been a portrait of a butler in his father's news-sheet.

"Well, then," said Tommy, inspired by this same source, "there's a room a butler has, and it is a pantry, so you and me crawled through the winder and we opened the door to the gang. You and me was copped. They catched you below the table and me stabbing the butler."

"It was me what stabbed the butler," Shovel interposed, jealously.

"How could you do it, Shovel?"

"With a knife, I tell yer!"

"Why, you did n't have no knife," said Tommy, impatiently.

This crushed Shovel, but he growled sulkily:

"Well, I bit him in the leg."

"Not you," said selfish Tommy. "You for-

gets about repenting, and if I let yer bite him, you would brag about it. It's safer without, Shovel."

Perhaps it was. "How long did I get in quod, then, Tommy?"

"Fourteen days."

"So did you?" Shovel said, with quick anxiety.

"I got a month," replied Tommy, firmly.

Shovel roared a word that would never have admitted him to the hall. Then, "I'm as game as you, and gamer," he whined.

"But I'm better at repenting. I tell yer, I'll cry when I'm repenting." Tommy's face lit up, and Shovel could not help saying, with a curious look at it:

"You — you ain't like any other cove I knows," to which Tommy replied, also in an awestruck voice:

"I'm so queer, Shovel, that when I thinks 'bout myself I'm — I'm sometimes near feared."

"What makes your face for to shine like that? Is it thinking about the blow-out?"

No, it was hardly that, but Tommy could not tell what it was. He and the saying about art for art's sake were in the streets that night, looking for each other.

The splendour of the brightly lighted hall, which was situated in one of the meanest streets of perhaps the most densely populated quarter in London, broke upon the two boys suddenly and hit

each in his vital part, tapping an invitation on Tommy's brain-pan and taking Shovel coquettishly in the stomach. Now was the moment when Shovel meant to strip Tommy of the ticket, but the spectacle in front dazed him, and he stopped to tell a vegetable barrow how he loved his dear father and his dear mother, and all the dear kids at home. Then Tommy darted forward and was immediately lost in the crowd surging round the steps of the hall.

Several gentlemen in evening dress stood framed in the lighted doorway, shouting: "Have your tickets in your hands and give them up as you pass in." They were fine fellows, helping in a splendid work, and their society did much good, though it was not so well organized as others that have followed in its steps; but Shovel, you may believe, was in no mood to attend to them. He had but one thought: that the traitor Tommy was doubtless at that moment boring his way toward them, underground, as it were, and "holding his ticket in his hand." Shovel dived into the rabble and was flung back upside down. Falling with his arms round a full-grown man, he immediately ran up him as if he had been a lamp-post, and was aloft just sufficiently long to see Tommy give up the ticket and saunter into the hall.

The crowd tried at intervals to rush the door. It was mainly composed of ragged boys, but here

and there were men, women, and girls, who came into view for a moment under the lights as the mob heaved and went round and round like a boiling potful. Two policemen joined the ticket-collectors, and though it was a good-humoured gathering, the air was thick with such cries as these:

"I lorst my ticket, ain't I telling yer? Gar on, guv'nor, lemme in!"

"Oh, crumpets, look at Jimmy! Jimmy never done nothink, your honour; he's a himposter."

"I'm the boy what kicked the peeler. Hie, you toff with the choker, ain't I to step up?"

"Tell yer, I'm a genooine criminal, I am. If yer don't lemme in I'll have the lawr on you."

"Let a poor cove in as his father drownded hisself for his country."

"What air yer torking about? Warn't I in larst year, and the cuss as runs the show, he says to me, 'Allers welcome,' he says. None on your sarse, Bobby. I demands to see the cuss what runs——"

"Jest keeping on me out 'cos I ain't done nothin'. Ho, this is a encouragement to honesty, I don't think."

Mighty in tongue and knee and elbow was an unknown knight, ever conspicuous; it might be but by a leg waving for one brief moment in the air. He did not want to go in, would not go in

though they went on their blooming knees to him; he was after a viper of the name of Tommy. Half an hour had not tired him, and he was leading another assault, when a magnificent lady, such as you see in wax-works, appeared in the vestibule and made some remark to a policeman, who then shouted:

"If so there be hany lad here called Shovel, he can step forrard."

A dozen lads stepped forward at once, but a flail drove them right and left, and the unknown knight had mounted the parapet amid a shower of execrations. "If you are the real Shovel," the lady said to him, "you can tell me how this proceeds, 'I love my dear father and my dear mother——' Go on."

Shovel obeyed, tremblingly. "And all the dear little kids at 'ome. You are a kind laidy or gentleman. I love yer. I will never do it again, so help me bob. Amen."

"Charming!" chirped the lady, and down pleasantly-smelling aisles she led him, pausing to drop an observation about Tommy to a clergyman: "So glad I came; I have discovered the most delightful little monster called Tommy." The clergyman looked after her half in sadness, half sarcastically; he was thinking that he had discovered a monster also.

At present the body of the hall was empty, but

its sides were lively with gorging boys, among whom ladies moved, carrying platefuls of good things. Most of them were sweet women, fighting bravely for these boys, and not at all like Shovel's patroness, who had come for a sensation. Tommy falling into her hands, she got it.

Tommy, who had a corner to himself, was lolling in it like a little king, and he not only ordered roast-beef for the awe-struck Shovel, but sent the lady back for salt. Then he whispered, exultantly: "Quick, Shovel, feel my pocket" (it bulged with two oranges), "now the inside pocket" (plum-duff), "now my waistcoat pocket" (threepence); "look in my mouth" (chocolates).

When Shovel found speech he began excitedly: "I love my dear father and my dear——"

"Gach!" said Tommy, interrupting him contemptuously. "Repenting ain't no go, Shovel. Look at them other coves; none of them has got no money, nor full pockets, and I tell you, it's 'cos they has repented."

"Gar on!"

"It's true, I tells you. That lady as is my one, she's called her ladyship, and she don't care a cuss for boys as has repented," which of course was a libel, her ladyship being celebrated wherever paragraphs penetrate for having knitted a pair of stockings for the deserving poor.

"When I saw that," Tommy continued bra-

zenly, "I bragged 'stead of repenting, and the wuss I says I am, she jest says, 'You little monster,' and gives me another orange."

"Then I'm done for," Shovel moaned, "for I rolled off that 'bout loving my dear father and my dear mother, blast 'em, soon as I seen her."

He need not let that depress him. Tommy had told her he would say it, but it was all flam.

Shovel thought the ideal arrangement would be for him to eat and leave the torking to Tommy. Tommy nodded. "I'm full, at any rate," he said, struggling with his waistcoat. "Oh, Shovel, I *am* full!"

Her ladyship returned, and the boys held by their contract, but of the dark character Tommy seems to have been, let not these pages bear the record. Do you wonder that her ladyship believed him? On this point we must fight for our Tommy. You would have believed him. Even Shovel, who knew, between the bites, that it was all whoppers, listened as to his father reading aloud. This was because another boy present half believed it for the moment also. When he described the eerie darkness of the butler's pantry, he shivered involuntarily, and he shut his eyes once—ugh!—that was because he saw the blood spouting out of the butler. He was turning up his trousers to show the mark of the butler's boot on his leg when the lady was called away, and

then Shovel shook him, saying: "Darn yer, doesn't yer know as it's all your eye?" which brought Tommy to his senses with a jerk.

"Sure's death, Shovel," he whispered, in awe, "I was thinking I done it, every bit!"

Had her ladyship come back she would have found him a different boy. He remembered now that Elspeth, for whom he had filled his pockets, was praying for him; he could see her on her knees, saying, "Oh, God, I'se praying for Tommy," and remorse took hold of him and shook him on his seat. He broke into one hysterical laugh and then immediately began to sob. This was the moment when Shovel should have got him quietly out of the hall.

Members of the society discussing him afterwards with bated breath said that never till they died could they forget her ladyship's face while he did it. "But did you notice the boy's own face? It was positively angelic." "Angelic, indeed; the little horror was intoxicated." No, there was a doctor present, and according to him it was the meal that had gone to the boy's head; he looked half starved. As for the clergyman, he only said: "We shall lose her subscription; I am glad of it."

Yes, Tommy was intoxicated, but with a beverage not recognized by the faculty. What happened was this: Supper being finished, the time had come for what Shovel called the jawing, and

the boys were now mustered in the body of the hall. The limited audience had gone to the gallery, and unluckily all eyes except Shovel's were turned to the platform. Shovel was apprehensive about Tommy, who was not exactly sobbing now; but strange, uncontrollable sounds not unlike the winding up of a clock proceeded from his throat; his face had flushed; there was a purposeful look in his usually unreadable eye; his fingers were fidgeting on the board in front of him, and he seemed to keep his seat with difficulty.

The personage who was to address the boys sat on the platform with clergymen, members of committee, and some ladies, one of them Tommy's patroness. Her ladyship saw Tommy and smiled to him, but obtained no response. She had taken a front seat, a choice that she must have regretted presently.

The chairman rose and announced that the Rev. Mr. —— would open the proceedings with prayer. The Rev. Mr. —— rose to pray in a loud voice for the waifs in the body of the hall. At the same moment rose Tommy, and began to pray in a squeaky voice for the people on the platform.

He had many Biblical phrases, mostly picked up in Thrums Street, and what he said was distinctly heard in the stillness, the clergyman being suddenly bereft of speech. "Oh," he cried, "look down on them ones there, for, oh, they are unworthy

of Thy mercy, and, oh, the worst sinner is her ladyship, her sitting there so brazen in the black frock with yellow stripes, and the worse I said I were the better pleased were she. Oh, make her think shame for tempting of a poor boy, forgetting suffer little children, oh, why cumbereth she the ground, oh ——"

He was in full swing before anyone could act. Shovel having failed to hold him in his seat, had done what was, perhaps, the next best thing, got beneath it himself. The arm of the petrified clergyman was still extended, as if blessing his brother's remarks; the chairman seemed to be trying to fling his right hand at the culprit; but her ladyship, after the first stab, never moved a muscle. Thus for nearly half a minute, when the officials woke up, and squeezing past many knees, seized Tommy by the neck and ran him out of the building. All down the aisle he prayed hysterically, and for some time afterwards, to Shovel, who had been cast forth along with him.

At an hour of that night when their mother was asleep, and it is to be hoped they were the only two children awake in London, Tommy sat up softly in the wardrobe to discover whether Elspeth was still praying for him. He knew that she was on the floor in a nightgown some twelve sizes too large for her, but the room was as silent

and black as the world he had just left, by taking his fingers from his ears and the blankets off his face.

"I see you," he said mendaciously, and in a guarded voice, so as not to waken his mother, from whom he had kept his escapade. This had not the desired effect of drawing a reply from Elspeth, and he tried bluster.

"You needna think as I'll repent, you brat, so there! What?

"I wish I hadna told you about it!" Indeed, he had endeavoured not to do so, but pride in his achievement had eventually conquered prudence.

"Reddy would have laughed, she would, and said as I was a wonder. Reddy was the kind I like. What?

"You ate up the oranges quick, and the plum-duff too, so you should pray for yoursel' as well as for me. It's easy to say as you didna know how I got them till after you eated them, but you should have found out. What?

"Do you think it was for my own self as I done it? I jest done it to get the oranges and plum-duff to you. I did, and the threepence, too. Eh? Speak, you little besom.

"I tell you as I did repent in the hall. I was greeting, and I never knowed I put up that prayer till Shovel told me on it. We was sitting in the street by that time."

This was true. On leaving the hall Tommy

had soon dropped to the cold ground and squatted there till he came to, when he remembered nothing of what had led to his expulsion. Like a stream that has run into a pond and only finds itself again when it gets out, he was but a continuation of the boy who when last conscious of himself was in the corner crying remorsefully over his misdeed; and in this humility he would have returned to Elspeth had no one told him of his prayer. Shovel, however, was at hand, not only to tell him all about it, but to applaud, and home strutted Tommy chuckling.

"I am sleeping," he next said to Elspeth, "so you may as well come to your bed."

He imitated the breathing of a sleeper, but it was the only sound to be heard in London, and he desisted fearfully. "Come away, Elspeth," he said, coaxingly, for he was very fond of her and could not sleep while she was cold and miserable.

Still getting no response he pulled his body inch by inch out of the bedclothes, and holding his breath, found the floor with his feet stealthily, as if to cheat the wardrobe into thinking that he was still in it. But his reason was to discover whether Elspeth had fallen asleep on her knees without her learning that he cared to know. Almost noiselessly he worked himself along the floor, but when he stopped to bring his face nearer hers, there was such a creaking of his joints that if Elspeth did

not hear it she — she must be dead! His knees played whack on the floor.

Elspeth only gasped once, but he heard, and remained beside her for a minute, so that she might hug him if such was her desire; and she put out her hand in the darkness so that his should not have far to travel alone if it chanced to be on the way to her. Thus they sat on their knees, each aghast at the hard-heartedness of the other.

Tommy put the blankets over the kneeling figure, and presently announced from the wardrobe that if he died of cold before repenting the blame of keeping him out of heaven would be Elspeth's. But the last word was muffled, for the blankets were tucked about him as he spoke, and two motherly little arms gave him the embrace they wanted to withhold. Foiled again, he kicked off the bedclothes and said: "I tell yer I wants to die!"

This terrified both of them, and he added, quickly:

"Oh, God, if I was sure I were to die to-night I would repent at once." It is the commonest prayer in all languages, but down on her knees slipped Elspeth again, and Tommy, who felt that it had done him good, said indignantly: "Surely that is religion. What?"

He lay on his face until he was frightened by a noise louder than thunder in the daytime — the

scraping of his eyelashes on the pillow. Then he sat up in the wardrobe and fired his three last shots.

"Elspeth Sandys, I'm done with yer forever, I am. I'll take care on yer, but I'll never kiss yer no more.

"When yer boasts as I'm your brother I'll say you ain't. I'll tell my mother about Reddy the morn, and syne she'll put you to the door smart.

"When you are a grown woman I'll buy a house to yer, but you'll have jest to bide in it by your lonely self, and I'll come once a year to speir how you are, but I won't come in, I won't — I'll jest cry up the stair."

The effect of this was even greater than he had expected, for now two were in tears instead of one, and Tommy's grief was the more heartrending, he was so much better at everything than Elspeth. He jumped out of the wardrobe and ran to her, calling her name, and he put his arms round her cold body, and the dear mite, forgetting how cruelly he had used her, cried, "Oh, tighter, Tommy, tighter; you didn't not mean it, did yer? Oh, you is terrible fond on me, ain't yer? And you won't not tell my mother 'bout Reddy, will yer, and you is no done wi' me forever, is yer? and you won't not put me in a house by myself, will yer? Oh, Tommy, is that the tightest you can do?"

And Tommy made it tighter, vowing, "I never meant it; I was a bad un to say it. If Reddy were to come back wanting for to squeeze you out, I would send her packing quick, I would. I tell yer what, I'll kiss you with folk looking on, I will, and no be ashamed to do it, and if Shovel is one of them what sees me, and he puts his finger to his nose, I'll blood the mouth of him, I will, dagont!"

Then he prayed for forgiveness, and he could always pray more beautifully than Elspeth. Even she was satisfied with the way he did it, and so, alack, was he.

"But you forgot to tell," she said fondly, when once more they were in the wardrobe together — "you forgot to tell as you filled your pockets wif things to me."

"I didn't forget," Tommy replied modestly. "I missed it out on purpose, I did, 'cos I was sure God knows on it without my telling him, and I thought he would be pleased if I didn't let on as I knowed it was good of me."

"Oh, Tommy," cried Elspeth, worshipping him, "I couldn't have doned that, I couldn't!" She was barely six, and easily taken in, but she would save him from himself if she could.

CHAPTER IX

AULD LANG SYNE

WHAT to do with her ladyship's threepence? Tommy finally decided to drop it into the charity-box that had once contained his penny. They held it over the slit together, Elspeth almost in tears because it was such a large sum to give away, but Tommy looking noble he was so proud of himself; and when he said "Three!" they let go.

There followed days of excitement centred round their money-box. Shovel introduced Tommy to a boy what said as after a bit you forget how much money was in your box, and then when you opened it, oh, Lor'! there is more than you thought, so he and Elspeth gave this plan a week's trial, affecting not to know how much they had gathered, but when they unlocked it, the sum was still only eightpence; so then Tommy told the liar to come on, and they fought while the horrified Elspeth prayed, and Tommy licked him, a result due to one of the famous Thrums left-

handers then on exhibition in that street for the first time, as taught the victor by Petey Whamond the younger, late of Tillyloss.

The money did come in, once in spate (twopence from Bob in twenty-four hours), but usually so slowly that they saw it resting on the way, and then, when they listened intently, they could hear the thud of Hogmanay. The last halfpenny was a special aggravation, strolling about, just out of reach, with all the swagger of sixpence, but at last Elspeth had it, and after that, the sooner Hogmanay came the better.

They concealed their excitement under too many wrappings, but their mother suspected nothing. When she was dressing on the morning of Hogmanay, her stockings happened to be at the other side of the room, and they were such a long way off that she rested on the way to them. At the meagre breakfast she said what a heavy teapot that was, and Tommy thought this funny, but the salt had gone from the joke when he remembered it afterwards. And when she was ready to go off to her work she hesitated at the door, looking at her bed and from it to her children as if in two minds, and then went quietly downstairs.

The distance seems greater than ever to-day, poor woman, and you stop longer at the corners, where rude men jeer at you. Scarcely can you push open the door of the dancing-school or lift

the pail; the fire has gone out, you must again go on your knees before it, and again the smoke makes you cough. Gaunt slattern, fighting to bring up the phlegm, was it really you for whom another woman gave her life, and thought it a rich reward to get dressing you once in your long clothes, when she called you her beautiful, and smiled, and smiling, died? Well, well; but take courage, Jean Myles. The long road still lies straight up hill, but your climbing is near an end. Shrink from the rude men no more, they are soon to forget you, so soon! It is a heavy door, but soon you will have pushed it open for the last time. The girls will babble still, but not to you, not of you. Cheer up, the work is nearly done. Her beautiful! Come, beautiful, strength for a few more days, and then you can leave the key of the leaden door behind you, and on your way home you may kiss your hand joyously to the weary streets, for you are going to die.

Tommy and Elspeth had been to the foot of the stair many times to look for her before their mother came back that evening, yet when she re-entered her home, behold, they were sitting calmly on the fender as if this were a day like yesterday or to-morrow, as if Tommy had not been on a business visit to Thrums Street, as if the hump on the bed did not mean that a glorious something

was hidden under the coverlet. True, Elspeth would look at Tommy imploringly every few minutes, meaning that she could not keep it in much longer, and then Tommy would mutter the one word "Bell" to remind her that it was against the rules to begin before the Thrums eight-o'clock bell rang. They also wiled away the time of waiting by inviting each other to conferences at the window where these whispers passed —

"She ain't got a notion, Tommy."

"Dinna look so often at the bed."

"If I could jest get one more peep at it!"

"No, no; but you can put your hand on the top of it as you go by."

The artfulness of Tommy lured his unsuspecting mother into telling how they would be holding Hogmanay in Thrums to-night, how cartloads of kebbock cheeses had been rolling into the town all the livelong day ("Do you hear them, Elspeth?"), and in dark closes the children were already gathering, with smeared faces and in eccentric dress, to sally forth as guisers at the clap of eight, when the ringing of a bell lets Hogmanay loose. ("You see, Elspeth?") Inside the houses men and women were preparing (though not by fasting, which would have been such a good way that it is surprising no one ever thought of it) for a series of visits, at every one of which they would

be offered a dram and kebbock and bannock, and in the grander houses "bridies," which are a sublime kind of pie.

Tommy had the audacity to ask what bridies were like. And he could not dress up and be a guiser, could he, mother, for the guisers sang a song, and he did not know the words? What a pity they could not get bridies to buy in London, and learn the song and sing it. But of course they could not! ("Elspeth, if you tumble off the fender again, she'll guess.")

Such is a sample of Tommy, but Elspeth was sly also, if in a smaller way, and it was she who said: "There ain't nothin' in the bed, is there, Tommy!" This duplicity made her uneasy, and she added, behind her teeth, "Maybe there is," and then, "O God, I knows as there is."

But as the great moment drew near there were no more questions; two children were staring at the clock and listening intently for the peal of a bell nearly five hundred miles away.

The clock struck. "Whisht! It's time, Elspeth! They've begun! Come on!"

A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Sandys was roused by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of two mysterious figures. The female wore a boy's jacket turned outside in, the male a woman's bonnet and a shawl, and to make his disguise the more impenetrable he carried a poker in

his right hand. They stopped in the middle of the floor and began to recite, rather tremulously,

> Get up, good wife, and binna sweir,
> And deal your bread to them that's here,
> For the time will come when you'll be dead,
> And then you'll need neither ale nor bread.

Mrs. Sandys had started, and then turned piteously from them; but when they were done she tried to smile, and said, with forced gaiety, that she saw they were guisers, and it was a fine night, and would they take a chair. The male stranger did so at once, but the female said, rather anxiously: "You are sure as you don't know who we is?" Their hostess shook her head, and then he of the poker offered her three guesses, a daring thing to do, but all went well, for her first guess was Shovel and his old girl; second guess, Before and After; third guess, Napoleon Buonaparte and the Auld Licht minister. At each guess the smaller of the intruders clapped her hands gleefully, but when, with the third, she was unmuzzled, she putted with her head at Mrs. Sandys and hugged her, screaming, "It ain't none on them; it's jest me, mother, it's Elspeth!" and even while their astounded hostess was asking could it be true, the male conspirator dropped his poker noisily (to draw attention to himself) and stood revealed as Thomas Sandys.

Wasn't it just like Thrums, wasn't it just the very, very same? Ah, it was wonderful, their mother said, but, alas there was one thing wanting: she had no Hogmanay to give the guisers.

Had she not? What a pity, Elspeth! What a pity, Tommy! What might that be in the bed, Elspeth? It couldn't not be their Hogmanay, could it, Tommy? If Tommy was his mother he would look and see. If Elspeth was her mother she would look and see.

Her curiosity thus cunningly aroused, Mrs. Sandys raised the coverlet of the bed and — there were three bridies, an oatmeal cake, and a hunk of kebbock. "And they comed from Thrums!" cried Elspeth, while Tommy cried, "Petey and the others got a lot sent from Thrums, and I bought the bridies from them, and they gave me the bannock and the kebbock for nuthin'!" Their mother did not utter the cry of rapture which Tommy expected so confidently that he could have done it for her; instead, she pulled her two children toward her, and the great moment was like to be a tearful rather than an ecstatic one, for Elspeth had begun to whimper, and even Tommy — but by a supreme effort he shouldered reality to the door.

"Is this my Hogmanay, guidwife?" he asked in the nick of time, and the situation thus being saved, the luscious feast was partaken of, the guisers listening solemnly as each bite went down.

They also took care to address their hostess as "guidwife" or "mistress," affecting not to have met her lately, and inquiring genially after the health of herself and family. "How many have you?" was Tommy's masterpiece, and she answered in the proper spirit, but all the time she was hiding great part of her bridie beneath her apron, Hogmanay having come too late for her.

Everything was to be done exactly as they were doing it in Thrums Street, and so presently Tommy made a speech; it was the speech of old Petey, who had rehearsed it several times before him. "Here's a toast," said Tommy, standing up and waving his arms, "here's a toast that we'll drink in silence, one that maun have sad thoughts at the back o't to some of us, but one, my friends, that keeps the hearts of Thrums folk green and ties us all thegither, like as it were wi' twine. It's to all them, wherever they may be the night, wha' have sat as lads and lasses at the Cuttle Well."

To one of the listeners it was such an unexpected ending that a faint cry broke from her, which startled the children, and they sat in silence looking at her. She had turned her face from them, but her arm was extended as if entreating Tommy to stop.

"That was the end," he said, at length, in a tone of expostulation; "it's auld Petey's speech."

"Are you sure," his mother asked wistfully,

"that Petey was to say *all* them as have sat at the Cuttle Well? He made no exception, did he?"

Tommy did not know what exception was, but he assured her that he had repeated the speech, word for word. For the remainder of the evening she sat apart by the fire, while her children gambled for crack-nuts, young Petey having made a teetotum for Tommy and taught him what the letters on it meant. Their mirth rang faintly in her ear, and they scarcely heard her fits of coughing; she was as much engrossed in her own thoughts as they in theirs, but hers were sad and theirs were jocund — Hogmanay, like all festivals, being but a bank from which we can only draw what we put in. So an hour or more passed, after which Tommy whispered to Elspeth: "Now's the time; they're at it now," and each took a hand of their mother, and she woke from her reverie to find that they had pulled her from her chair and were jumping up and down, shouting, excitedly, "For Auld Lang Syne, my dear, for Auld Lang Syne, Auld Lang Syne, my dear, Auld Lang Syne." She tried to sing the words with her children, tried to dance round with them, tried to smile, but ——

It was Tommy who dropped her hand first. "Mother," he cried, "your face is wet, you're greeting sair, and you said you had forgot the way."

"I mind it now, man, I mind it now," she said, standing helplessly in the middle of the room.

Elspeth nestled against her, crying, "My mother was thinking about Thrums, wasn't she, Tommy?"

"I was thinking about the part o't I'm most awid to be in," the poor woman said, sinking back into her chair.

"It's the Den," Tommy told Elspeth.

"It's the Square," Elspeth told Tommy.

"No, it's Moneypenny."

"No, it's the Commonty."

But it was none of these places. "It's the cemetery," the woman said, "it's the hamely, quiet cemetery on the hillside. Oh, there's mony a bonny place in my nain bonny toon, but there's nain so hamely like as the cemetery." She sat shaking in the chair, and they thought she was to say no more, but presently she rose excitedly, and with a vehemence that made them shrink from her she cried: "I winna lie in London! tell Aaron Latta that; I winna lie in London!"

For a few more days she trudged to her work, and after that she seldom left her bed. She had no longer strength to coax up the phlegm, and a doctor brought in by Shovel's mother warned her that her days were near an end. Then she wrote her last letter to Thrums, Tommy and Elspeth standing by to pick up the pen when it fell from her feeble hand, and in the intervals she told them that she was Jean Myles.

"And if I die and Aaron hasna come," she said,

"you maun just gang to auld Petey and tell him wha you are."

"But how can you be Jean Myles?" asked astounded Tommy. "You ain't a grand lady and ——"

His mother looked at Elspeth. "No' afore her," she besought him; but before he set off to post the letter she said: "Come canny into my bed the night, when Elspeth's sleeping, and syne I'll tell you all there is to tell about Jean Myles."

"Tell me now whether the letter is to Aaron Latta?"

"It's for him," she said, "but it's no' to him. I'm feared he might burn it without opening it if he saw my write on the cover, so I've wrote it to a friend of his wha will read it to him."

"And what's inside, mother?" the boy begged, inquisitively. "It must be queer things if they'll bring Aaron Latta all the way from Thrums."

"There's but little in it, man," she said, pressing her hand hard upon her chest. "It's no muckle mair than 'Auld Lang Syne, my dear, for Auld Lang Syne.'"

CHAPTER X

THE FAVOURITE OF THE LADIES

That night the excited boy was wakened by a tap-tap, as of someone knocking for admittance, and stealing to his mother's side, he cried, "Aaron Latta has come; hearken to him chapping at the door!"

It was only the man through the wall, but Mrs. Sandys took Tommy into bed with her, and while Elspeth slept, told him the story of her life. She coughed feebly now, but the panting of the dying is a sound that no walls can cage, and the man continued to remonstrate at intervals. Tommy never recalled his mother's story without seeming, through the darkness in which it was told, to hear Elspeth's peaceful breathing and the angry tap-tap on the wall.

"I'm sweer to tell it to you," she began, "but tell I maun, for though it's just a warning to you and Elspeth no' to be like them that brought you into the world, it's all I have to leave you. Ay, and there's another reason; you may soon be among folk wha ken but half the story, and put a waur face on it than I deserve."

She had spoken calmly, but her next words were passionate.

"They thought I was fond o' him," she cried; "oh, they were blind, blind! Frae the first I could never thole the sight o' him.

"Maybe that's no true," she had to add. "I aye kent he was a black, but yet I couldna put him out o' my head; he took sudden grips o' me like an evil thought. I aye ran frae him, and yet I sair doubt that I went looking for him too."

"Was it Aaron Latta?" Tommy asked.

"No, it was your father. The first I ever saw of him was at Cullew, four lang miles frae Thrums. There was a ball after the market, and Esther Auld and me went to it. We went in a cart, and I was wearing a pink print, wi' a white bonnet, and blue ribbons that tied aneath the chin. I had a shawl abune, no to file them. There wasna a more innocent lassie in Thrums, man, no, nor a happier one; for Aaron Latta — Aaron came half the way wi' us, and he was hauding my hand aneath the shawl. He hadna speired me at that time, but I just kent.

"It was an auld custom to choose a queen of beauty at the ball, but that night the men couldna 'gree wha should be judge, and in the tail-end they went out thegither to look for one, determined to mak' judge o' the first man they met, though they should have to tear him off a horse and bring him

in by force. You wouldna believe to look at me now, man, that I could have had any thait o' being made queen, but I was fell bonny, and I was as keen as the rest. How simple we were, all pretending to one another that we didna want to be chosen! Esther Auld said she would hod ahint the tent till a queen was picked, and at the very time she said it, she was in a palsy, through no being able to decide whether she looked better in her shell necklace or wanting it. She put it on in the end, and syne when we heard the tramp o' the men, her mind misgave her, and she cried: 'For the love o' mercy, keep them out till I get it off again!' So we were a' laughing when they came in.

"Laddie, it was your father and Elspeth's that they brought wi' them, and he was a stranger to us, though we kent something about him afore the night was out. He was finely put on, wi' a gold chain, and a free w'y of looking at women, and if you mind o' him ava, you ken that he was fair and buirdly, wi' a full face, and aye a laugh ahint it. I tell ye, man, that when our een met, and I saw that triumphing laugh ahint his face, I took a fear of him, as if I had guessed the end.

"For years and years after that night I dreamed it ower again, and aye I heard mysel' crying to God to keep that man awa' frae me. But I doubt I put up no sic prayer at the time; his masterful look fleid me, and yet it drew me against my will,

and I was trembling wi' pride as well as fear when he made me queen. We danced thegither and fought thegither a' through the ball, and my will was no match for his, and the worst o't was I had a kind o' secret pleasure in being mastered.

"Man, he kissed me. Lads had kissed me afore that night, but never since first I went wi' Aaron Latta to the Cuttle Well. Aaron hadna done it, but I was never to let none do it again except him. So when your father did it I struck him, but ahint the redness that came ower his face, I saw his triumphing laugh, and he whispered that he liked me for the blow. He said, 'I prefer the sweer anes, and the more you struggle, my beauty, the better pleased I'll be.' Almost his inmost words to me was, 'I've been hearing of your Aaron, and that pleases me too!' I fired up at that and telled him what I thought of him, but he said, 'If you canna abide me, what made you dance wi' me so often?' and, oh, laddie, that's a question that has sung in my head since syne.

"I've telled you that we found out wha he was, and 'deed he made no secret of it. Up to the time he was twal year auld he had been a kent face in that part, for his mither was a Cullew woman called Mag Sandys, ay, and a single woman. She was a hard ane too, for when he was twelve year auld he flung out o' the house saying he would ne'er come back, and she said he shouldna run awa'

wi' thae new boots on, so she took the boots off him and let him go.

"He was a grown man when more was heard o' him, and syne stories came saying he was at Redlintie, playing queer games wi' his father. His father was gauger there, that's exciseman, a Mr. Cray, wha got his wife out o' Thrums, and even when he was courting her (so they say) had the heart to be ower chief wi' this other woman. Weel, Magerful Tam, as he was called through being so masterful, cast up at Redlintie frae none kent where, gey desperate for siller, but wi' a black coat on his back, and he said that all he wanted was to be owned as the gauger's son. Mr. Cray said there was no proof that he was his son, and syne the queer sport began. Your father had noticed he was like Mr. Cray, except in the beard, and so he had his beard clippit the same, and he got haud o' some weel-kent claethes o' the gauger's that had been presented to a poor body, and he learned up a' the gauger's tricks of speech and walking, especially a droll w'y he had o' taking snuff and syne flinging back his head. They were as like as buckies after that, and soon there was a town about it, for one day ladies would find that they had been bowing to the son thinking he was the father, and the next they wouldna speak to the father, mistaking him for the son; and a report spread to the head office o' the excise that the gauger of Redlintie spent

his evenings at a public house, singing 'The Deil's awa' wi' the Exciseman.' Tam drank nows and nans, and it ga'e Mr. Cray a turn to see him come rolling yont the street, just as if it was himsel' in a looking-glass. He was a sedate-living man now, but chiefly because his wife kept him in good control, and this sight brought back auld times so vive to him, that he a kind of mistook which ane he was, and took to dropping, forgetful-like, into public-houses again. It was high time Tam should be got out of the place, and they did manage to bribe him into leaving, though no easily, for it had been fine sport to him, and to make a sensation was what he valued above all things. We heard that he went back to Redlintie a curran years after, but both the gauger and his wife were dead, and I ken that he didna trouble the twa daughtors. They were Miss Ailie and Miss Kitty, and as they werena left as well off as was expected they came to Thrums, which had been their mother's town, and started a school for the gentry there. I dinna doubt but what it's the school that Esther Auld's laddie is at.

"So after being long lost sight o' he turned up at Cullew, wi' what looked to simple folk a fortune in his pouches, and half a dozen untrue stories about how he made it. He had come to make a show o' himsel' afore his mither, and I dare say to give her some gold, for he was aye ready to give

when he had, I'll say that for him; but she had flitted to some unkent place, and so he bade on some weeks at the Cullew public. He caredna whether the folk praised or blamed him so long as they wondered at him, and queer stories about his doings was aye on the road to Thrums. One was that he gave wild suppers to whaever would come; another that he went to the kirk just for the glory of flinging a sovereign into the plate wi' a clatter; another that when he lay sleeping on twa chairs, gold and silver dribbled out o' his trousor pouches to the floor.

"There was an ugly story too, about a lassie, that led to his leaving the place and coming to Thrums, after he had near killed the Cullew smith in a fight. The first I heard o' his being in Thrums was when Aaron Latta walked into my granny's house and said there was a strange man at the Tappit Hen public standing drink to any that would tak', and boasting that he had but to waggle his finger to make me give Aaron up. I went wi' Aaron and looked in at the window, but I kent wha it was afore I looked. If Aaron had just gone in and struck him! All decent women, laddie, has a horror of being fought about. I'm no sure but what that's just the difference atween guid ones and ill ones, but this man had a power ower me; and if Aaron had just struck him! Instead o' meddling he turned white, and I couldna help

contrasting them, and thinking how masterful your father looked. Fine I kent he was a brute, and yet I couldna help admiring him for looking so magerful.

"He bade on at the Tappit Hen, flinging his siller about in the way that made him a king at Cullew, but no molesting Miss Ailie and Miss Kitty, which all but me thought was what he had come to Thrums to do. Aaron and me was cried for the first time the Sabbath after he came, and the next Sabbath for the second time, but afore that he was aye getting in my road and speaking to me, but I ran frae him and hod frae him when I could, and he said the reason I did that was because I kent his will was stronger than mine. He was aye saying things that made me think he saw down to the bottom o' my soul; what I didna understand was that in mastering other women he had been learning to master me. Ay, but though I thought ower muckle about him, never did I speak him fair. I loo'ed Aaron wi' all my heart, and your father kent it; and that, I doubt, was what made him so keen, for, oh, but he was vain!

"And now we've come to the night I'm so sweer to speak about. She was a good happy lassie that went into the Den that moonlight night wi' Aaron's arm round her, but it was another woman that came out. We thought we had the Den to oursel's, and as we sat on the Shoaging

Stane at the Cuttle Well, Aaron wrote wi' a stick on the ground 'Jean Latta,' and prigged wi' me to look at it, but I spread my hands ower my face, and he didna ken that I was keeking at it through my fingers all the time. We was so ta'en up with oursel's that we saw nobody coming, and all at once there was your father by the side o' us! 'You've written the wrong name, Aaron,' he said, jeering and pointing with his foot at the letters; 'it should be Jean Sandys.'

"Aaron said not a word, but I had a presentiment of ill, and I cried, 'Dinna let him change the name, Aaron!' Your father had been to change it himsel', but at that he had a new thait, and he said, 'No, I'll no' do it; your brave Aaron shall do it for me.'

"Laddie, it doesna do for a man to be a coward afore a woman that's fond o' him. A woman will thole a man's being anything except like hersel'. When I was sure Aaron was a coward I stood still as death, waiting to ken wha's I was to be.

"Aaron did it. He was loath, but your father crushed him to the ground, and said do it he should, and warned him too that if he did it he would lose me, bantering him and cowing him and advising him no' to shame me, all in a breath. He kent so weel, you see, what was in my mind, and aye there was that triumphing laugh ahint his face. If Aaron had fought and been beaten, even

if he had just lain there and let the man strike away, if he had done anything except what he was bidden, he would have won, for it would have broken your father's power ower me. But to write the word! It was like dishonouring me to save his ain skin, and your father took good care he should ken it. You've heard me crying to Aaron in my sleep, but it wasna for him I cried, it was for his fireside. All the love I had for him, and it was muckle, was skailed forever that night at the Cuttle Well. Without a look ahint me away I went wi' my master, and I had no more will to resist him—and oh, man, man, when I came to mysel' next morning I wished I had never been born!

"The men folk saw that Aaron had shamed them, and they werena quite so set agin me as the women, wha had guessed the truth, though they couldna be sure o't. Sair I pitied mysel', and sair I grat, but only when none was looking. The mair they miscalled me the higher I held my head, and I hung on your father's arm as if I adored him, and I boasted about his office and his clerk in London till they believed what I didna believe a word o' myself.

"But though I put sic a brave face on't, I was near demented in case he shouldna marry me, and he kent that and jokit me about it. Dinna think I was fond o' him; I hated him now. And dinna

think his masterfulness had any more power ower me; his power was broken forever when I woke up that weary morning. But that was ower late, and to wait on by mysel' in Thrums for what might happen, and me a single woman — I daredna! So I flattered at him, and flattered at him, till I got the fool side o' him, and he married me.

"My granny let the marriage take place in her house, and he sent in so muckle meat and drink that some folk was willing to come. One came that wasna wanted. In the middle o' the marriage Aaron Latta, wha had refused to speak to anybody since that night, walked in wearing his blacks, wi' crape on them, as if it was a funeral, and all he said was that he had come to see Jean Myles coffined. He went away quietly as soon as we was married, but the crowd outside had fathomed his meaning, and abune the minister's words I could hear them crying, 'Ay, it's mair like a burial than a marriage!'

"My heart was near breaking wi' woe, but, oh, I was awid they shouldna ken it, and the bravest thing I ever did was to sit through the supper that night, making muckle o' your father, looking fond-like at him, laughing at his coarse jokes, and secretly hating him down to my very marrow a' the time. The crowd got word o' the on-goings, and they took a cruel revenge. A carriage had been ordered for nine o'clock to take us to Tillie-

drum, where we should get the train to London, and when we heard it, as we thought, drive up to the door, out we went, me on your father's arm laughing, but wi' my teeth set. But Aaron's words had put an idea into their heads, though he didna intend it, and they had got out the hearse. It was the hearse they had brought to the door instead of a carriage.

"We got awa' in a carriage in the tailend, and the stanes hitting it was all the good luck flung after me. It had just one horse, and I mind how I cried to Esther Auld, wha had been the first to throw, that when I came back it would be in a carriage and pair.

"Ay, I had pride! In the carriage your father telled me as a joke that he had got away without paying the supper, and that about all the money he had now, forby what was to pay our tickets to London, was the half-sovereign on his watch-chain. But I was determined to have Thrums think I had married grand, and as I had three pound six on me, the savings o' all my days, I gave two pound of it to Malcolm Crabb, the driver, unbeknown to your father, but pretending it was frae him, and telled him to pay for the supper and the carriage with it. He said it was far ower muckle, but I just laughed, and said wealthy gentlemen like Mr. Sandys couldna be bothered to take back change, so Malcolm could keep what was ower. Malcolm

was the man Esther Auld had just married, and I counted on this maddening her and on Malcolm's spreading the story through the town. Laddie, I've kent since syne what it is to be without bite or sup, but I've never grudged that siller."

The poor woman had halted many times in her tale, and she was glad to make an end. "You've forgotten what a life he led me in London," she said, "and it could do you no good to hear it, though it might be a lesson to thae lassies at the dancing-school wha think so much o' masterful men. It was by betting at horse-races that your father made a living, and whiles he was large o' siller, but that didna last, and I question whether he would have stuck to me if I hadna got work. Well, he's gone, and the Thrums folk'll soon ken the truth about Jean Myles now."

She paused, and then cried, with extraordinary vehemence: "Oh, man, how I wish I could keep it frae them for ever and ever!"

But presently she was calm again and she said: "What I've been telling you, you can understand little o' the now, but some of it will come back to you when you're a grown man, and if you're magerful and have some lassie in your grip, maybe for the memory of her that bore you, you'll let the poor thing awa'."

And she asked him to add this to his nightly prayer: "O God, keep me from being a magerful

man!" and to teach this other prayer to Elspeth, "O God, whatever is to be my fate, may I never be one of them that bow the knee to magerful men, and if I was born like that and canna help it, oh, take me up to heaven afore I'm fil't."

The wardrobe was invisible in the darkness, but they could still hear Elspeth's breathing as she slept, and the exhausted woman listened long to it, as if she would fain carry away with her to the other world the memory of that sweet sound.

"If you gang to Thrums," she said at last, "you may hear my story frae some that winna spare me in the telling; but should Elspeth be wi' you at sic times, dinna answer back; just slip quietly away wi' her. She's so young that she'll soon forget all about her life in London and all about me, and that'll be best for her. I would like her lassiehood to be bright and free frae cares, as if there had never been sic a woman as me. But laddie, oh, my laddie, dinna you forget me; you and me had him to thole thegither, dinna you forget me! Watch ower your little sister by day and hap her by night, and when the time comes that a man wants her — if he be magerful, tell her my story at once. But gin she loves one that is her ain true love, dinna rub off the bloom, laddie, with a word about me. Let her and him gang to the Cuttle Well, as Aaron and me went, kenning no guile and thinking none, and with their arms round one

another's waists. But when her wedding-day comes round——"

Her words broke in a sob and she cried: "I see them, I see them standing up thegither afore the minister! Oh! you lad, you lad that's to be married on my Elspeth, turn your face and let me see that you're no' a magerful man!"

But the lad did not turn his face, and when she spoke next it was to Tommy.

"In the bottom o' my kist there's a little silver teapot. It's no' real silver, but it's fell bonny. I bought it for Elspeth twa or three months back when I saw I couldna last the winter. I bought it to her for a marriage present. She's no to see it till her wedding-day comes round. Syne you're to give it to her, man, and say it's with her mother's love. Tell her all about me, for it canna harm her then. Tell her of the fool lies I sent to Thrums, but dinna forget what a bonny place I thought it all the time, nor how I stood on many a driech night at the corner of that street, looking so waeful at the lighted windows, and hungering for the wring of a Thrums hand or the sound of the Thrums word, and all the time the shrewd blasts cutting through my thin trails of claithes. Tell her, man, how you and me spent this night, and how I fought to keep my hoast down so as no' to waken her. Mind that whatever I have been, I was aye fond o' my bairns, and slaved for them till I dropped.

She'll have long forgotten what I was like, and it's just as well, but yet — Look at me, Tommy, look long, long, so as you'll be able to call up my face as it was on the far-back night when I telled you my mournful story Na, you canna see in the dark, but haud my hand, haud it tight, so that, when you tell Elspeth, you'll mind how hot it was, and the skin loose on it; and put your hand on my cheeks, man, and feel how wet they are wi' sorrowful tears, and lay it on my breast, so that you can tell her how I was shrunk awa'. And if she greets for her mother a whiley, let her greet."

The sobbing boy hugged his mother. "Do you think I'm an auld woman?" she said to him.

"You're gey auld, are you no'?" he answered. "Ay," she said, "I'm gey auld; I'm nine and twenty. I was seventeen on the day when Aaron Latta went half-road in the cart wi' me to Cullew, hauding my hand aneath my shawl. He hadna speired me, but I just kent."

Tommy remained in his mother's bed for the rest of the night, and so many things were buzzing in his brain that not for an hour did he think it time to repeat his new prayer. At last he said reverently: "O God, keep me from being a magerful man!" Then he opened his eyes to let God see that his prayer was ended, and added to himself: "But I think I would fell like it."

CHAPTER XI

AARON LATTA

The Airlie post had dropped the letters for outlying farms at the Monypenny smithy and trudged on. The smith having wiped his hand on his hair, made a row of them, without looking at the addresses, on his window-sill, where, happening to be seven in number, they were almost a model of Monypenny, which is within hail of Thrums, but round the corner from it, and so has ways of its own. With the next clang on the anvil the middle letter fell flat, and now the likeness to Monypenny was absolute.

Again all the sound in the land was the melancholy sweet kink, kink, kink of the smith's hammer.

Across the road sat Dite Deuchars, the mole-catcher, a solitary figure, taking his pleasure on the dyke. Behind him was the flour-miller's field, and beyond it the Den, of which only some tree-tops were visible. He looked wearily east the road, but no one emerged from Thrums; he looked wearily west the road, which doubled out of sight at Aaron Latta's cottage, little more than a stone's

throw distant. On the inside of Aaron's window an endless procession seemed to be passing, but it was only the warping-mill going round. It was an empty day, but Dite, the accursed, was used to them; nothing ever happened where he was, but many things as soon as he had gone.

He yawned and looked at the houses opposite. They were all of one story; the smith's had a rusty plough stowed away on its roof; under a window stood a pew and bookboard, bought at the roup of an old church, and thus transformed into a garden-seat. There were many of them in Thrums that year. All the doors, except that of the smithy, were shut, until one of them blew ajar, when Dite knew at once, from the smell which crossed the road, that Blinder was in the bunk pulling the teeth of his potatoes. May Ann Irons, the blind man's niece, came out at this door to beat the cistern with a bass, and she gave Dite a wag of her head. He was to be married to her if she could get nothing better.

By and by the Painted Lady came along the road. She was a little woman, brightly dressed, so fragile that a collie might have knocked her over with his tail, and she had a beautiful white-and-pink face, the white ending of a sudden in the middle of her neck, where it met skin of a duller color. As she tripped along with mincing gait, she was speaking confidentially to herself, but

when she saw Dite grinning, she seemed, first, afraid, and then sorry for herself, and then she tried to carry it off with a giggle, cocking her head impudently at him. Even then she looked childish, and a faded guilelessness, with many pretty airs and graces, still lingered about her, like innocent birds loath to be gone from the spot where their nest has been. When she had passed monotony again reigned, and Dite crossed to the smithy window, though none of the letters could be for him. He could read the addresses on six of them, but the seventh lay on its back, and every time he rose on his tip-toes to squint down at it, the spout pushed his bonnet over his eyes.

"Smith," he cried in at the door, "to gang hame afore I ken wha that letter's to is more than I can do."

The smith good-naturedly brought the letter to him, and then glancing at the address was dumfounded. "God behears," he exclaimed, with a sudden look at the distant cemetery, "it's to Double Dykes!"

Dite also shot a look at the cemetery. "He'll never get it," he said, with mighty conviction.

The two men gazed at the cemetery for some time, and at last Dite muttered, "Ay, ay, Double Dykes, you was aye fond o' your joke!"

"What has that to do wi' 't?" rapped out the smith, uncomfortably.

Dite shuddered. "Man," he said, "does that letter no bring Double Dykes back terrible vive again! If we was to see him climbing the cemetery dyke the now, and coming stepping down the fields in his moleskin waistcoat wi' the pearl buttons——"

Auchterlonie stopped him with a nervous gesture.

"But it couldna be the pearl buttons," Dite added thoughtfully, "for Betty Finlayson has been wearing them to the kirk this four year. Ay, ay, Double Dykes, that puts you farther awa' again."

The smith took the letter to a neighbour's house to ask the advice of old Irons, the blind tailor, who when he lost his sight had given himself the name of Blinder for bairns to play with.

"Make your mind easy, smith," was Blinder's counsel. "The letter is meant for the Painted Lady. What's Double Dykes? It's but the name of a farm, and we gave it to Sanders because he was the farmer. He's dead, and them that's in the house now become Double Dykes in his place."

But the Painted Lady only had the house, objected Dite; Nether Drumgley was farming the land, and so he was the real Double Dykes. True, she might have pretended to her friends that she had the land also.

She had no friends, the smith said, and since she

came to Double Dykes from no one could find out where, though they knew her furniture was bought in Tilliedrum, she had never got a letter. Often, though, as she passed his window she had keeked sideways at the letters, as bairns might look at parlys. If he made a tinkle with his hammer at such times off she went at once, for she was as easily flichtered as a field of crows, that take wing if you tap your pipe on the loof of your hand. It was true she had spoken to him once; when he suddenly saw her standing at his smiddy door the surprise near made him fall over his brot. She looked so neat and ladylike that he gave his hair a respectful pull before he remembered the kind of woman she was.

And what was it she said to him? Dite asked eagerly.

She had pointed to the letters on the window-sill, and said she, "Oh, the dear loves!" It was a queer say, but she had a bonny English word. The English word was no doubt prideful, but it melted in the mouth like a lick of sirup. She offered him sixpence for a letter, any letter he liked, but of course he refused it. Then she prigged with him just to let her hold one in her hands, for said she, bairnlike, "I used to get one every day." It so happened that one of the letters was to Mysy Robbie; and Mysy was of so little importance that he thought there would be no harm

in letting the Painted Lady hold her letter, so he gave it to her, and you should have seen her dawting it with her hand and holding it to her breast like a lassie with a pigeon. "Isn't it sweet," she said, and before he could stop her she kissed it. She forgot it was no letter of hers, and made to open it, and then she fell a-trembling and saying she durst not read it, for you never knew whether the first words might not break your heart. The envelope was red where her lips had touched it, and yet she had an innocent look beneath the paint. When he took the letter from her, though, she called him a low, vulgar fellow for presuming to address a lady. She worked herself into a fury, and said far worse than that; a perfect guller of clarty language came pouring out of her. He had heard women curse many a time without turning a hair, but he felt wae when she did it, for she just spoke it like a bairn that had been in ill company.

The smith's wife, Suphy, who had joined the company, thought that men were easily taken in, especially smiths. She offered, however, to convey the letter to Double Dykes. She was anxious to see the inside of the Painted Lady's house, and this would be a good opportunity. She admitted that she had crawled to the east window of it before now, but that dour bairn of the Painted Lady's had seen her head and whipped down the blind.

Unfortunate Suphy! she could not try the

window this time, as it was broad daylight, and the Painted Lady took the letter from her at the door. She returned crestfallen, and for an hour nothing happened. The mole-catcher went off to the square, saying, despondently, that nothing would happen until he was round the corner. No sooner had he rounded the corner than something did happen.

A girl who had left Double Dykes with a letter was walking quickly toward Monypenny. She wore a white pinafore over a magenta frock, and no one could tell her whether she was seven or eight, for she was only the Painted Lady's child. Some boys, her natural enemies, were behind; they had just emerged from the Den, and she heard them before they saw her, and at once her little heart jumped and ran off with her. But the halloo that told her she was discovered checked her running. Her teeth went into her underlip; now her head was erect. After her came the rabble with a rush, flinging stones that had no mark and epithets that hit. Grizel disdained to look over her shoulder. Little hunted child, where was succour to come from if she could not fight for herself?

Though under the torture she would not cry out. "What's a father?" was their favourite jeer, because she had once innocently asked this question of a false friend. One tried to snatch the let-

ter from her, but she flashed him a look that sent him to the other side of the dyke, where, he said, did she think he was afraid of her? Another strutted by her side, mimicking her in such diverting manner that presently the others had to pick him out of the ditch. Thus Grizel moved onward defiantly until she reached Monypenny, where she tossed the letter in at the smithy door and immediately returned home. It was the letter that had been sent to her mother, now sent back, because it was meant for the dead farmer after all.

The smith read Jean Myles's last letter, with a face of growing gravity. "Dear Double Dykes," it said, "I send you these few scrapes to say I am dying, and you and Aaron Latta was seldom sindry, so I charge you to go to him and say to him 'Aaron Latta, it's all lies Jean Myles wrote to Thrums about her grandeur, and her man died mony year back, and it was the only kindness he ever did her, and if she doesna die quick, her and her starving bairns will be flung out into the streets.' If that doesna move him, say, 'Aaron Latta, do you mind yon day at Inverquharity and the cushie doos?' likewise, 'Aaron Latta, do you mind yon day at the Kaims of Airlie?' likewise, 'Aaron Latta, do you mind that Jean Myles was ower heavy for you to lift? Oh, Aaron, you could lift me so pitiful easy now.' And syne says you

solemnly three times, 'Aaron Latta, Jean Myles is lying dying all alone in a foreign land; Aaron Latta, Jean Myles is lying dying all alone in a foreign land; Aaron Latta, Jean Myles is lying dying all alone in a foreign land.' And if he's sweer to come, just say, 'Oh, Aaron, man, you micht; oh, Aaron, oh, Aaron, are you coming?'"

The smith had often denounced this woman, but he never said a word against her again. He stood long reflecting, and then took the letter to Blinder and read it to him.

"She doesna say, 'Oh, Aaron Latta, do you mind the Cuttle Well?'" was the blind man's first comment.

"She was thinking about it," said Auchterlonie.

"Ay, and he's thinking about it," said Blinder, "night and day, night and day. What a toun there'll be about that letter, smith!"

"There will. But I'm to take it to Aaron afore the news spreads. He'll never gang to London though."

"I think he will, smith."

"I ken him well."

"Maybe I ken him better."

"You canna see the ugly mark it left on his brow."

"I can see the uglier marks it has left in his breast."

"Well, I'll take the letter; I can do no more."

When the smith opened the door of Aaron's house, he let out a draught of hot air that was glad to be gone from the warper's restless home. The usual hallan, or passage, divided the but from the ben, and in the ben a great revolving thing, the warping-mill, half filled the room. Between it and a pile of webs that obscured the light a little silent man was sitting on a box turning a handle. His shoulders were almost as high as his ears, as if he had been caught forever in a storm, and though he was barely five and thirty, he had the tattered, dishonoured beard of black and white that comes to none till the glory of life has gone.

Suddenly the smith appeared round the webs. "Aaron," he said, awkwardly, "do you mind Jean Myles?"

The warper did not for a moment take his eyes off a contrivance with pirns in it that was climbing up and down the whirring mill.

"She's dead," he answered.

"She's dying," said the smith.

A thread broke, and Aaron had to rise to mend it.

"Stop the mill and listen," Auchterlonie begged him, but the warper returned to his seat and the mill again revolved.

"This is her dying words to you," continued the smith. "Did you speak?"

"I didna, but I wish you would take your arm off the haik."

"She's loath to die without seeing you. Do you hear, man? You shall listen to me, I tell you."

"I am listening, smith," the warper replied, without rancour. "It's but right that you should come here to take your pleasure on a shamed man." His calmness gave him a kind of dignity.

"Did I ever say you was a shamed man, Aaron?"

"Am I not?" the warper asked quietly; and Auchterlonie hung his head.

Aaron continued, still turning the handle, "You're truthful, and you canna deny it. Nor will you deny that I shamed you and every other mother's son that night. You try to hod it out o' pity, smith, but even as you look at me now, does the man in you no rise up against me?"

"If so," the smith answered reluctantly, "if so, it's against my will."

"It is so," said Aaron, in the same measured voice, "and it's right that it should be so. A man may thieve or debauch or murder, and yet no be so very different frae his fellow-men, but there's one thing he shall not do without their wanting to spit him out o' their mouths, and that is, violate the feelings of sex."

The strange words in which the warper described his fall had always an uncomfortable effect on those who heard him use them, and Auchterlonie could only answer in distress, "Maybe that 's what it is."

"That's what it is. I have had twal lang years sitting on this box to think it out. I blame none but mysel'."

"Then you'll have pity on Jean in her sair need," said the smith. He read slowly the first part of the letter, but Aaron made no comment, and the mill had not stopped for a moment.

"She says," the smith proceeded, doggedly — "she says to say to you, 'Aaron Latta, do you mind yon day at Inverquharity and the cushie doos?'"

Only the monotonous whirr of the mill replied.

"She says, 'Aaron Latta, do you mind that Jean Myles was ower heavy for you to lift? Oh, Aaron, you could lift me so pitiful easy now.'"

Another thread broke and the warper rose with sudden fury.

"Now that you've eased your conscience, smith," he said, fiercely, "make your feet your friend."

"I'll do so," Auchterlonie answered, laying the letter on the webs, "but I leave this ahint me."

"Wap it in the fire."

"If that's to be done, you do it yoursel'. Aaron, she treated you ill, but ——"

"There's the door, smith."

The smith walked away, and had only gone a few steps when he heard the whirr of the mill again. He went back to the door.

"She's dying, man!" he cried.

"Let her die!" answered Aaron.

In an hour the sensational news was through half of Thrums, of which Monypenny may be regarded as a broken piece, left behind, like the dot of quicksilver in the tube, to show how high the town once rose. Some could only rejoice at first in the down-come of Jean Myles, but most blamed the smith (and himself among them) for not taking note of her address, so that Thrums Street could be informed of it and sent to her relief. For Blinder alone believed that Aaron would be softened.

"It was twa threads the smith saw him break," the blind man said, "and Aaron's good at his work. He'll go to London, I tell you."

"You forget, Blinders, that he was warping afore I was a dozen steps frae the door."

"Ay, and that just proves he hadna burned the letter, for he hadna time. If he didna do it at the first impulse, he'll no do it now."

Every little while the boys were sent along the road to look in at Aaron's end window and report.

At seven in the evening Aaron had not left his box, and the blind man's reputation for seeing farther than those with eyes was fallen low.

"It's a good sign," he insisted, nevertheless. "It shows his mind's troubled, for he usually louses at six."

By eight the news was that Aaron had left his mill and was sitting staring at his kitchen fire.

"He's thinking o' Inverquharity and the cushie doos," said Blinder.

"More likely," said Dite Deuchars, "he's thinking o' the Cuttle Well."

Corp Shiach clattered along the road about nine to say that Aaron Latta was putting on his blacks as if for a journey.

At once the blind man's reputation rose on stilts. It fell flat, however, before the ten-o'clock bell rang, when three of the Auchterlonie children, each pulling the others back that he might arrive first, announced that Aaron had put on his corduroys again, and was back at the mill.

"That settles it," was everyone's good-night to Blinder, but he only answered thoughtfully, "There's a fierce fight going on, my billies."

Next morning when his niece was shaving the blind man, the razor had to travel over a triumphant smirk which would not explain itself to womankind, Blinder being a man who could bide his time. The time came when the smith looked in to say, "Should I gang yont to Aaron's and see if he'll give me the puir woman's address?"

"No, I wouldna advise that," answered Blinder, cleverly concealing his elation, "for Aaron Latta's awa' to London."

"What! How can you ken?"

"I heard him go by in the night."

"It's no possible!"

"I kent his foot."

"You're sure it was Aaron?"

Blinder did not consider the question worth answering, his sharpness at recognizing friends by their tread being proved. Sometimes he may have carried his pretensions too far. Many granted that he could tell when a doctor went by, when a lawyer, when a thatcher, when a herd, and this is conceivable, for all callings have their walk. But he was regarded as uncanny when he claimed not only to know ministers in this way, but to be able to distinguish between the steps of the different denominations.

He had made no mistake about the warper, however. Aaron was gone, and ten days elapsed before he was again seen in Thrums.

CHAPTER XII

A CHILD'S TRAGEDY

No one in Thrums ever got a word from Aaron Latta about how he spent those ten days, and Tommy and Elspeth, whom he brought back with him, also tried to be reticent, but some of the women were too clever for them. Jean and Aaron did not meet again. Her first intimation that he had come she got from Shovel, who said that a little high-shouldered man in black had been inquiring if she was dead, and was now walking up and down the street, like one waiting. She sent her children out to him, but he would not come up. He had answered Tommy roughly, but when Elspeth slipped her hand into his, he let it stay there, and he instructed her to tell Jean Myles that he would bury her in the Thrums cemetery and bring up her bairns. Jean managed once to go to the window and look down at him, and by and by he looked up and saw her. They looked long at each other, and then he turned away his head and began to walk up and down again.

At Tilliedrum the coffin was put into a hearse

and thus conveyed to Monypenny, Aaron and the two children sitting on the box-seat. Someone said, "Jean Myles boasted that when she came back to Thrums it would be in her carriage and pair, and she has kept her word," and the saying is still preserved in that Bible for week-days of which all little places have their unwritten copy, one of the wisest of books, but nearly every text in it has cost a life.

About a score of men put on their blacks and followed the hearse from the warper's house to the grave. Elspeth wanted to accompany Tommy, but Aaron held her back, saying, quietly, "In this part, it's only men that go to burials, so you and me maun bide at hame," and then she cried, no one understood why, except Tommy. It was because he would see Thrums first; but he whispered to her, "I promise to keep my eyes shut and no look once," and so faithfully did he keep his promise on the whole that the smith held him by the hand most of the way, under the impression that he was blind.

But he had opened his eyes at the grave, when a cord was put into his hand, and then he wept passionately, and on his way back to Monypenny, whether his eyes were open or shut, what he saw was his mother being shut up in a black hole and trying for ever and ever to get out. He ran to Elspeth for comfort, but in the meantime she had

learned from Blinder's niece that graves are dark and cold, and so he found her sobbing even like himself. Tommy could never bear to see Elspeth crying, and he revealed his true self in his way of drying her tears.

"It will be so cold in that hole," she sobbed.

"No," he said, "it's warm."

"It will be dark."

"No, it's clear."

"She would like to get out."

"No, she was terrible pleased to get in."

It was characteristic of him that he soon had Elspeth happy by arguments not one of which he believed himself; characteristic also that his own grief was soothed by the sound of them. Aaron, who was in the garret preparing their bed, had told the children that they must remain indoors to-day out of respect to their mother's memory (to-morrow morning they could explore Thrums); but there were many things in that kitchen for them to look at and exult over. It had no commonplace ceiling, the couples, or rafters, being covered with the loose flooring of a romantic garret, and in the rafters were several great hooks, from one of which hung a ham, and Tommy remembered, with a thrill which he communicated to Elspeth, that it is the right of Thrums children to snip off the ham as much as they can remove with their finger-nails and roast it on the ribs of the fire. The chief

pieces of furniture were a dresser, a corner cupboard with diamond panes, two tables, one of which stood beneath the other, but would have to come out if Aaron tried to bake, and a bed with a door. These two did not know it, but the room was full of memories of Jean Myles. The corner cupboard had been bought by Aaron at a roup because she said she would like to have one; it was she who had chosen the six cups and saucers with the blue spots on them. A razor-strop, now hard as iron, hung on a nail on the wall; it had not been used since the last time Aaron strutted through the Den with his sweetheart. One day later he had opened the door of the bird-cage, which still stood in the window, and let the yellow yite go. Many things were where no woman would have left them: clothes on the floor with the nail they had torn from the wall; on a chair a tin basin, soapy water and a flannel rag in it; horn spoons with whistles at the end of them were anywhere — on the mantelpiece, beneath the bed; there were drawers that could not be opened because their handles were inside. Perhaps the windows were closed hopelessly also, but this must be left doubtful; no one had ever tried to open them.

The garret where Tommy and Elspeth were to sleep was reached by a ladder from the hallan; when you were near the top of the ladder your head hit a trap-door and pushed it open. At one

end of the garret was the bed, and at the other end were piled sticks for firewood and curious dark-coloured slabs whose smell the children disliked until Tommy said, excitedly, "Peat!" and then they sniffed reverently.

It was Tommy, too, who discovered the tree-tops of the Den, and Elspeth seeing him gazing in a transport out at the window cried, "What is it, Tommy? Quick!"

"Promise no to scream," he replied, warningly. "Well, then, Elspeth Sandys, that's where the Den is!"

Elspeth blinked with awe, and anon said, wistfully, "Tommy, do you see that there? That's where the Den is!"

"It were me what told you," cried Tommy, jealously.

"But let me tell you, Tommy!"

"Well, then, you can tell me."

"That there is the Den, Tommy!"

"Dagont!"

Oh, that to-morrow were here! Oh, that Shovel could see these two to-morrow!

Here is another splendid game, T. Sandys, inventor. The girl goes into the bed, the boy shuts the door on her, and imitates the sound of a train in motion. He opens the door and cries, "Tickets, please." The girl says, "What is the name of this place?" The boy replies, "It's Thrums!"

There is more to follow, but the only two who have played the game always roared so joyously at this point that they could get no farther.

"Oh, to-morrow, come quick, quick!"

"Oh, poor Shovel!"

To-morrow came, and with it two eager little figures rose and gulped their porridge, and set off to see Thrums. They were dressed in the black clothes Aaron Latta had bought for them in London, and they had agreed just to walk, but when they reached the door and saw the tree-tops of the Den they — they ran. Would you not like to hold them back? It is a child's tragedy.

They went first into the Den, and the rocks were dripping wet, all the trees, save the firs, were bare, and the mud round a tiny spring pulled off one of Elspeth's boots.

"Tommy," she cried, quaking, "that narsty puddle can't not be the Cuttle Well, can it?"

"No, it ain't," said Tommy, quickly, but he feared it was.

"It's c-c-colder here than London," Elspeth said, shivering, and Tommy was shivering too, but he answered, "I'm — I'm — I'm warm."

The Den was strangely small, and soon they were on a shabby brae where women in short gowns came to their doors and men in night-caps sat down on the shafts of their barrows to look at Jean Myles's bairns.

"What does yer think?" Elspeth whispered, very doubtfully.

"They're beauties," Tommy answered, determinedly.

Presently Elspeth cried, "Oh, Tommy, what a ugly stair! Where is the beauty stairs as is wore outside for show?"

This was one of them and Tommy knew it. "Wait till you see the west town end," he said bravely; "it's grand." But when they were in the west town end, and he had to admit it, "Wait till you see the square," he said, and when they were in the square, "Wait," he said, huskily, "till you see the town-house." Alas, this was the town-house facing them, and when they knew it, he said hurriedly, "Wait till you see the Auld Licht Kirk."

They stood long in front of the Auld Licht Kirk, which he had sworn was bigger and lovelier than St. Paul's, but — well, it is a different style of architecture, and had Elspeth not been there with tears in waiting, Tommy would have blubbered. "It's — it's littler than I thought," he said desperately, "but — the minister, oh, what a wonderful big man he is!"

"Are you sure?" Elspeth squeaked.

"I swear he is."

The church door opened and a gentleman came out, a little man, boyish in the back, with the

eager face of those who live too quickly. But it was not at him that Tommy pointed reassuringly; it was at the monster church key, half of which protruded from his tail pocket and waggled like the hilt of a sword.

Speaking like an old residenter, Tommy explained that he had brought his sister to see the church. "She's ta'en aback," he said, picking out Scotch words carefully, "because it's littler than the London kirks, but I telled her — I telled her that the preaching is better."

This seemed to please the stranger, for he patted Tommy on the head while inquiring, "How do you know that the preaching is better?"

"Tell him, Elspeth," replied Tommy modestly.

"There ain't nuthin' as Tommy don't know," Elspeth explained. "He knows what the minister is like too."

"He's a noble sight," said Tommy.

"He can get anything from God he likes," said Elspeth.

"He's a terrible big man," said Tommy.

This seemed to please the little gentleman less.

"Big!" he exclaimed, irritably; "why should he be big?"

"He is big," Elspeth almost screamed, for the minister was her last hope.

"Nonsense!" said the little gentleman. "He is — well, I am the minister."

"You!" roared Tommy, wrathfully.

"Oh, oh, oh!" sobbed Elspeth.

For a moment the Rev. Mr. Dishart looked as if he would like to knock two little heads together, but he walked away without doing it.

"Never mind," Tommy whispered hoarsely to Elspeth. "Never mind, Elspeth, you have me yet."

This consolation seldom failed to gladden her, but her disappointment was so sharp to-day that she would not even look up.

"Come away to the cemetery, it's grand," he said; but still she would not be comforted.

"And I'll let you hold my hand — as soon as we're past the houses," he added.

"I'll let you hold it now," he said eventually; but even then Elspeth cried dismally, and her sobs were hurting him more than her.

He knew all the ways of getting round Elspeth, and when next he spoke it was with a sorrowful dignity. "I didna think," he said, "as yer wanted me never to be able to speak again; no, I didna think it, Elspeth."

She took her hands from her face and looked at him inquiringly.

"One of the stories mamma telled me and Reddy," he said, "were about a man what saw such a beauty thing that he was struck dumb with admiration. Struck dumb is never to be able to

speak again, and I wish I had been struck dumb when you wanted it."

"But I didn't want it!" Elspeth cried.

"If Thrums had been one little bit beautier than it is," he went on solemnly, "it would have struck me dumb. It would have hurt me sore, but what about that, if it pleased you!"

Then did Elspeth see what a wicked girl she had been, and when next the two were observed by the curious (it was on the cemetery road), they were once more looking cheerful. At the smallest provocation they exchanged notes of admiration, such as, "Oh, Tommy, what a bonny barrel!" or "Oh, Elspeth, I tell yer that's a dyke, and there's just walls in London," but sometimes Elspeth would stoop hastily, pretending that she wanted to tie her bootlace, but really to brush away a tear, and there were moments when Tommy hung very limp. Each was trying to deceive the other for the other's sake, and one of them was never good at deception. They saw through each other, yet kept up the chilly game, because they could think of nothing better, and perhaps the game was worth playing, for love invented it.

They sat down on their mother's grave. No stone was ever erected to the memory of Jean Myles, but it is enough for her that she lies at home. That comfort will last her to the Judgment Day.

The man who had dug the grave sent them away, and they wandered to the hill, and thence down the Roods, where there were so many outside stairs not put there for show that it was well Elspeth remembered how susceptible Tommy was to being struck dumb. For her sake he said, "They're bonny," and for his sake she replied, "I'm glad they ain't bonnier."

When within one turn of Monypenny they came suddenly upon some boys playing at capey-dykey, a game with marbles that is only known in Thrums. There are thirty-five ways of playing marbles, but this is the best way, and Elspeth knew that Tommy was hungering to look on, but without her, lest he should be accused of sweethearting. So she offered to remain in the background.

Was she sure she shouldn't mind?

She said falteringly that of course she would mind a little, but——

Then Tommy was irritated, and said he knew she would mind, but if she just pretended she didn't mind, he could leave her without feeling that he was mean.

So Elspeth affected not to mind, and then he deserted her, conscience at rest, which was his nature. But he should have remained with her. The players only gave him the side of their eye, and a horrid fear grew on him that they did not

know he was a Thrums boy. "Dagont!" he cried to put them right on that point, but though they paused in their game, it was only to laugh at him uproariously. Let the historian use an oath for once; dagont, Tommy had said the swear in the wrong place!

How fond he had been of that word! Many a time he had fired it in the face of Londoners, and the flash had often blinded them and always him. Now he had brought it home, and Thrums would have none of it; it was as if these boys were jeering at their own flag. He tottered away from them until he came to a trance, or passage, where he put his face to the wall and forgot even Elspeth.

He had not noticed a girl pass the mouth of the trance, trying not very successfully to conceal a brandy-bottle beneath her pinafore, but presently he heard shouts, and looking out he saw Grizel, the Painted Lady's child, in the hands of her tormentors. She was unknown to him, of course, but she hit back so courageously that he watched her with interest, until — until suddenly he retreated farther into the trance. He had seen Elspeth go on her knees, obviously to ask God to stay the hands and tongues of these cruel boys.

Elspeth had disgraced him, he felt. He was done with her forever. If they struck her, serve her right.

Struck her! Struck little Elspeth! His imagina-

tion painted the picture with one sweep of its brush. Take care, you boys, Tommy is scudding back.

They had not molested Elspeth as yet. When they saw and heard her praying, they had bent forward, agape, as if struck suddenly in the stomach. Then one of them, Francie Crabb, the golden-haired son of Esther Auld, recovered and began to knead Grizel's back with his fists, less in viciousness than to show that the prayer was futile. Into this scene sprang Tommy, and he thought that Elspeth was the kneaded one. Had he taken time to reflect he would probably have used the Thrums feint, and then in with a left-hander, which is not very efficacious in its own country; but being in a hurry he let out with Shovel's favourite, and down went Francie Crabb.

"Would you!" said Tommy, threatening, when Francie attempted to rise.

He saw now that Elspeth was untouched, that he had rescued an unknown girl, and it cannot be pretended of him that he was the boy to squire all ladies in distress. In ordinary circumstances he might have left Grizel to her fate, but having struck for her, he felt that he would like to go on striking. He had also the day's disappointments to avenge. It is startling to reflect that the little minister's height, for instance, put an extra kick in him.

So he stood stridelegs over Francie, who whim-

pered, "I wouldna have struck this one if that one hadna prayed for me. It wasna likely I would stand that."

"You shall stand it," replied Tommy, and turning to Elspeth, who had risen from her knees, he said: "Pray away, Elspeth."

Elspeth refused, feeling that there would be something wrong in praying from triumph, and Tommy, about to be very angry with her, had a glorious inspiration. "Pray for yourself," he said to Francie, "and do it out loud."

The other boys saw that a novelty promised, and now Francie need expect no aid from them. At first he refused to pray, but he succumbed when Tommy had explained the consequences, and illustrated them.

Tommy dictated: "Oh, God, I am a sinner. Go on."

Francie not only said it, but looked it.

"And I pray to you to repent me, though I ain't worthy," continued Tommy.

"And I pray to you to repent me, though I ain't worthy," growled Francie. (It was the arrival of ain't in Thrums.)

Tommy considered, and then: "I thank Thee, O God," he said, "for telling this girl — this lassie — to pray for me."

Two gentle taps helped to knock this out of Francie.

Being an artist, Tommy had kept his best for the end (and made it up first). "And lastly," he said, "I thank this boy for thrashing me — I mean this here laddie. Oh, may he allus be near to thrash me when I strike this other lassie again. Amen."

When it was all over Tommy looked around triumphantly, and though he liked the expression on several faces, Grizel's pleased him best. "It ain't no wonder you would like to be me, lassie!" he said, in an ecstasy.

"I don't want to be you, you conceited boy," retorted the Painted Lady's child hotly, and her heat was the greater because the clever little wretch had read her thoughts aright. But it was her sweet voice that surprised him.

"You're English!" he cried.

"So are you," broke in a boy offensively, and then Tommy said to Grizel loftily, "Run away; I'll not let none on them touch you."

"I am not afraid of them," she rejoined, with scorn, "and I shall not let you help me, and I won't run." And run she did not; she walked off leisurely with her head in the air, and her dignity was beautiful, except once when she made the mistake of turning round to put out her tongue.

But, alas! in the end someone ran. If only they had not called him "English." In vain he fired a volley of Scotch; they pretended not to understand it. Then he screamed that he and

Shovel could fight the lot of them. Who was Shovel? they asked derisively. He replied that Shovel was a bloke who could lick any two of them — and with one hand tied behind his back.

No sooner had he made this proud boast than he went white, and soon two disgraceful tears rolled down his cheeks. The boys saw that for some reason unknown his courage was gone, and even Francie Crabb began to turn up his sleeves and spit upon his hands.

Elspeth was as bewildered as the others, but she slipped her hand into his and away they ran ingloriously, the foe too much astounded to jeer. She sought to comfort him by saying (and it brought her a step nearer womanhood), "You wasn't feared for yourself, you wasn't; you was just feared they would hurt me."

But Tommy sobbed in reply, "That ain't it. I bounced so much about the Thrums folk to Shovel, and now the first day I'm here I heard myself bouncing about Shovel to Thrums folk, and it were that what made me cry. Oh, Elspeth, it's — it's not the same what I thought it would be!"

Nor was it the same to Elspeth, so they sat down by the roadside and cried with their arms round each other, and any passer-by could look who had the heart. But when night came, and they were in their garret bed, Tommy was once more seeking to comfort Elspeth with arguments he disbelieved,

and again he succeeded. As usual, too, the make-believe made him happy also.

"Have you forgot," he whispered, "that my mother said as she would come and see us every night in our bed? If yer cries, she'll see as we're terrible unhappy, and that will make her unhappy too."

"Oh, Tommy, is she here now?"

"Whisht! She's here, but they don't like living ones to let on as they knows it."

Elspeth kept closer to Tommy, and with their heads beneath the blankets, so as to stifle the sound, he explained to her how they could cheat their mother. When she understood, he took the blankets off their faces and said in the darkness in a loud voice:

"It's a grand place, Thrums!"

Elspeth replied in a similar voice, "Ain't the town-house just big!"

Said Tommy, almost chuckling, "Oh, the bonny, bonny Auld Licht Kirk!"

Said Elspeth, "Oh, the beauty outside stairs!"

Said Tommy, "The minister is so long!"

Said Elspeth, "The folk is so kind!"

Said Tommy, "Especially the laddies!"

"Oh, I is so happy!" cried Elspeth.

"Me too!" cried Tommy.

"My mother would be so chirpy if she could jest see us!" Elspeth said, quite archly.

"But she canna!" replied Tommy, slyly pinching Elspeth in the rib.

Then they dived beneath the blankets, and the whispering was resumed.

"Did she hear, does yer think?" asked Elspeth.

"Every word," Tommy replied. "Elspeth, we've done her!"

CHAPTER XIII

SHOWS HOW TOMMY TOOK CARE OF ELSPETH

Thus the first day passed, and others followed in which women, who had known Jean Myles, did her children kindnesses, but could not do all they would have done, for Aaron forbade them to enter his home except on business though it was begging for a housewife all day. Had Elspeth at the age of six now settled down to domestic duties she would not have been the youngest housekeeper ever known in Thrums, but she was never very good at doing things, only at loving and being loved, and the observant neighbours thought her a backward girl; they forgot, like most people, that service is not necessarily a handicraft. Tommy discovered what they were saying, and to shield Elspeth he took to housewifery with the blind down; but Aaron, entering the kitchen unexpectedly, took the besom from him, saying:

"It's an ill thing for men folk to ken ower muckle about women's work."

"You do it yoursel'," Tommy argued.

"I said men folk," replied Aaron, quietly.

The children knew that remarks of this sort had reference to their mother, of whom he never spoke more directly; indeed he seldom spoke to them at all, and save when he was cooking or giving the kitchen a slovenly cleaning they saw little of him. Monypenny had predicted that their presence must make a new man of him, but he was still unsociable and morose and sat as long as ever at the warping-mill, of which he seemed to have become the silent wheel. Tommy and Elspeth always dropped their voices when they spoke of him, and sometimes when his mill stopped he heard one of them say to the other, "Whisht, he's coming!" Though he seldom spoke sharply to them, his face did not lose its loneliness at sight of them. Elspeth was his favourite (somewhat to the indignation of both); they found this out without his telling them or even showing it markedly, and when they wanted to ask anything of him she was deputed to do it, but she did it quavering, and after drawing farther away from him instead of going nearer. A dreary life would have lain before them had they not been sent to school.

There were at this time three schools in Thrums, the chief of them ruled over by the terrible Cathro (called Knuckly when you were a street away from him). It was a famous school, from which a band of three or four or even six marched every autumn to the universities as determined after bur-

saries as ever were Highlandmen to lift cattle, and for the same reason, that they could not do without.

A very different kind of dominie was Cursing Ballingall, who had been dropped at Thrums by a travelling circus, and first became familiar to the town as, carrying two carpet shoes, two books, a pillow, and a saucepan, which were all his belongings, he wandered from manse to manse offering to write sermons for the ministers at circus prices. That scheme failing, he was next seen looking in at windows in search of a canny calling, and eventually he cut one of his braces into a pair of tawse, thus with a single stroke of the knife making himself a schoolmaster and lop-sided for life. His fee was but a penny a week, "with a bit o' the swine when your father kills," and sometimes there were so many pupils on a form that they could only rise as one. During the first half of the scholastic day Ballingall's shouts and pounces were for parents to listen to, but after his dinner of crowdy, which is raw meal and hot water, served in a cogie, or wooden bowl, languor overcame him and he would sleep, having first given out a sum in arithmetic and announced:

"The one as finds out the answer first, I'll give him his licks."

Last comes the Hanky School, which was for the genteel and for the common who contemplated

soaring. You were not admitted to it in corduroys or barefooted, nor did you pay weekly; no, your father called four times a year with the money in an envelope. He was shown into the blue-and-white room, and there, after business had been transacted, very nervously on Miss Ailie's part, she offered him his choice between ginger wine and what she falteringly called wh-wh-whiskey. He partook in the polite national manner, which is thus:

"You will take something, Mr. Cortachy?"

"No, I thank you, ma'am."

"A little ginger wine?"

"It agrees ill with me."

"Then a little wh-wh-whiskey?"

"You are ower kind."

"Then may I?"

"I am not heeding."

"Perhaps, though, you don't take?"

"I can take it or want it."

"Is that enough?"

"It will do perfectly."

"Shall I fill it up?"

"As you please, ma'am."

Miss Ailie's relationship to the magerful man may be remembered; she shuddered to think of it herself, for in middle-age she retained the mind of a young girl, but when duty seemed to call, this schoolmistress could be brave, and she offered

to give Elspeth her schooling free of charge. Like the other two hers was a "mixed" school, but she did not want Tommy, because she had seen him in the square one day, and there was a leer on his face that reminded her of his father.

Another woman was less particular. This was Mrs. Crabb, of the Tappit Hen, the Esther Auld whom Jean Myles's letters had so frequently sent to bed. Her Francie was still a pupil of Miss Ailie, and still he wore the golden hair, which, despite all advice, she would not crop. It was so beautiful that no common boys could see it without wanting to give it a tug in passing, and partly to prevent this, partly to show how high she had risen in the social scale, Esther usually sent him to school under the charge of her servant lass. She now proposed to Aaron that this duty should devolve on Tommy, and for the service she would pay his fees at the Hanky School.

"We maun all lend a hand to poor Jean's bairns," she said, with a gleam in her eye. "It would have been well for her, Aaron, if she had married you."

"Is that all you have to say?" asked the warper, who had let her enter no farther than the hallan.

"I would expect him to lift Francie ower the pools in wet weather; and it might be as well if he called him Master Francie."

"Is that all?"

"Ay, I ask no more, for we maun all help Jean's bairns. If she could only look down, Aaron, and see her little velvets, as she called him, lifting my little corduroys ower the pools!"

Aaron flung open the door. "Munt!" he said, and he looked so dangerous that she retired at once. He sent Tommy to Ballingall's, and accepted Miss Ailie's offer for Elspeth, but this was an impossible arrangement, for it was known to the two persons primarily concerned that Elspeth would die if she was not where Tommy was. The few boys he had already begun to know were at Cathro's or Ballingall's, and as they called Miss Ailie's a lassie school he had no desire to attend it, but where he was there also must Elspeth be. Daily he escaped from Ballingall's and hid near the Dovecot, as Miss Ailie's house was called, and every little while he gave vent to Shovel's whistle, so that Elspeth might know of his proximity and be cheered. Thrice was he carried back, kicking, to Ballingall's by urchins sent in pursuit, stern ministers of justice on the first two occasions; but on the third they made him an offer; if he would hide in Couthie's hen-house they were willing to look for him everywhere else for two hours.

Tommy's behaviour seemed beautiful to the impressionable Miss Ailie, but it infuriated Aaron, and on the fourth day he set off for the parish

school, meaning to put the truant in the hands of Cathro, from whom there was no escape. Vainly had Elspeth implored him to let Tommy come to the Dovecot, and vainly apparently was she trotting at his side now, looking up appealingly in his face. But when they reached the gate of the parish school-yard he walked past it because she was tugging him, and always when he seemed about to turn she took his hand again, and he seemed to have lost the power to resist Jean Myles's bairn. So they came to the Dovecot, and Miss Ailie gained a pupil who had been meant for Cathro. Tommy's arms were stronger than Elspeth's, but they could not have done as much for him that day.

Thus did the two children enter upon the genteel career, to the indignation of the other boys and girls of Monypenny, all of whom were commoners.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HANKY SCHOOL

The Dovecot was a prim little cottage standing back from the steepest brae in Thrums and hidden by high garden walls, to the top of which another boy's shoulders were, for apple-lovers, but one step up. Jargonelle trees grew against the house, stretching their arms round it as if to measure its girth, and it was also remarkable for several "dumb" windows with the most artful blinds painted on them. Miss Ailie's fruit was famous, but she loved her flowers best, and for long a notice-board in her garden said, appealingly: "Persons who come to steal the fruit are requested not to walk on the flower-beds." It was that old bachelor, Dr. McQueen, who suggested this inscription to her, and she could never understand why he chuckled every time he read it.

There were seven rooms in the house, but only two were of public note, the school-room, which was down-stairs, and the blue-and-white room above. The school-room was so long that it looked very low in the ceiling, and it had a carpet,

and on the walls were texts as well as maps. Miss Ailie's desk was in the middle of the room, and there was another desk in the corner; a cloth had been hung over it, as one covers a cage to send the bird to sleep. Perhaps Miss Ailie thought that a bird had once sung there, for this had been the desk of her sister, Miss Kitty, who died years before Tommy came to Thrums. Dainty Miss Kitty, Miss Kitty with the roguish curls, it is strange to think that you are dead, and that only Miss Ailie hears you singing now at your desk in the corner! Miss Kitty never sang there, but the playful ringlets were once the bright thing in the room, and Miss Ailie sees them still, and they are a song to her.

The pupils had to bring handkerchiefs to the Dovecot, which led to its being called the Hanky School, and in time these handkerchiefs may be said to have assumed a religious character, though their purpose was merely to protect Miss Ailie's carpet. She opened each scholastic day by reading fifteen verses from the Bible, and then she said sternly, "Hankies!" whereupon her pupils whipped out their handkerchiefs, spread them on the floor and kneeled on them while Miss Ailie repeated the Lord's Prayer. School closed at four o'clock, again with hankies.

Only on great occasions were the boys and girls admitted to the blue-and-white room, when they

were given shortbread, but had to eat it with their heads flung back so that no crumbs should fall. Nearly everything in this room was blue or white, or both. There were white blinds and blue curtains, a blue table-cover and a white crumb-cloth, a white sheepskin with a blue footstool on it, blue chairs dotted with white buttons. Only white flowers came into this room, where there were blue vases for them, not a book was to be seen without a blue alpaca cover. Here Miss Ailie received visitors in her white with the blue braid, and enrolled new pupils in blue ink with a white pen. Some laughed at her, others remembered that she must have something to love after Miss Kitty died.

Miss Ailie had her romance, as you may hear by and by, but you would not have thought it as she came forward to meet you in the blue-and-white room, trembling lest your feet had brought in mud, but too much a lady to ask you to stand on a newspaper, as she would have liked dearly to do. She was somewhat beyond middle-age, and stoutly, even squarely, built, which gave her a masculine appearance; but she had grown so timid since Miss Kitty's death that when she spoke you felt that either her figure or her manner must have been intended for someone else. In conversation she had a way of ending a sentence in the middle which gave her a reputation of being "thro'ither," though an artificial tooth was the cause. It was

slightly loose, and had she not at times shut her mouth suddenly, and then done something with her tongue, an accident might have happened. This tooth fascinated Tommy, and once when she was talking he cried, excitedly, "Quick, it's coming!" whereupon her mouth snapped close, and she turned pink in the blue-and-white room.

Nevertheless Tommy became her favourite, and as he had taught himself to read, after a fashion, in London, where his lesson-books were chiefly placards and the journal subscribed to by Shovel's father, she often invited him after school hours to the blue-and-white room, where he sat on a kitchen chair (with his boots off) and read aloud, very slowly, while Miss Ailie knitted. The volume was from the Thrums Book Club, of which Miss Ailie was one of the twelve members. Each member contributed a book every year, and as their tastes in literature differed, all sorts of books came into the club, and there was one member who invariably gave a ro-ro-romance. He was double-chinned and forty, but the schoolmistress called him the dashing young banker, and for months she avoided his dangerous contribution. But always there came a black day when a desire to read the novel seized her, and she hurried home with it beneath her rokelay. This year the dashing banker's choice was a lady's novel called "I Love My Love with an A," and it was a frivolous tale, those being

before the days of the new fiction, with its grand discovery that women have an equal right with men to grow beards. The hero had such a way with him and was so young (Miss Ailie could not stand them a day more than twenty) that the schoolmistress was enraptured and scared at every page, but she fondly hoped that Tommy did not understand. However, he discovered one day what something printed thus, "D—n," meant, and he immediately said the word with such unction that Miss Ailie let fall her knitting. She would have ended the readings then had not Agatha been at that point in the arms of an officer who, Miss Ailie felt almost certain, had a wife in India, and so how could she rest till she knew for certain? To track the officer by herself was not to be thought of, to read without knitting being such shameless waste of time, and it was decided to resume the readings on a revised plan: Tommy to say "stroke" in place of the "D—ns," and "word we have no concern with" instead of "Darling" and "Little One."

Miss Ailie was not the only person at the Dovecot who admired Tommy. Though in duty bound, as young patriots, to jeer at him for having been born in the wrong place, the pupils of his own age could not resist the charm of his reminiscences; even Gav Dishart, a son of the manse, listened attentively to him. His great topic was his birth-

place, and whatever happened in Thrums he instantly made contemptible by citing something of the same kind, but on a larger scale, that had happened in London; he turned up his nose almost farther than was safe when they said Catlaw was a stiff mountain to climb. ("Oh, Gav, if you just saw the London mountains!") Snow! why, they didn't know what snow was in Thrums. If they could only see St. Paul's or Hyde Park or Shovel! he couldn't help laughing at Thrums, he couldn't—Larfing, he said at first, but in a short time his Scotch was better than theirs, though less unconscious. His English was better also, of course, and you had to speak in a kind of English when inside the Hanky School; you got your revenge at "minutes." On the whole, Tommy irritated his fellow-pupils a good deal, but they found it difficult to keep away from him.

He also contrived to enrage the less genteel boys of Monypenny. Their leader was Corp Shiach, three years Tommy's senior, who had never been inside a school except once, when he broke hopefully into Ballingall's because of a stirring rumour (nothing in it) that the dominie had hangit himself with his remaining brace; then in order of merit came Birkie Fleemister; then, perhaps, the smith's family, called the Haggerty-Taggertys, they were such slovens. When school was over Tommy frequently stepped out of his boots and

stockings, so that he no longer looked offensively genteel, and then Monypenny was willing to let him join in spyo, smuggle bools, kickbonnety, peeries, the preens, suckers, pilly, or whatever game was in season, even to the baiting of the Painted Lady, but they would not have Elspeth, who should have been content to play dumps with the female Haggerty-Taggertys, but could enjoy no game of which Tommy was not the larger half. Many times he deserted her for manlier joys, but though she was out of sight he could not forget her longing face, and soon he sneaked off to her; he upbraided her, but he stayed with her. They bore with him for a time, but when they discovered that she had persuaded him (after prayer) to put back the spug's eggs which he had brought home in triumph, then they drove him from their company, and for a long time afterwards his deadly enemy was the hard-hitting Corp Shiach.

Elspeth was not invited to attend the readings of "I Love My Love with an A," perhaps because there were so many words in it that she had no concern with, but she knew they ended as the eight-o'clock bell began to ring, and it was her custom to meet Tommy a few yards from Aaron's door. Farther she durst not venture in the gloaming through fear of the Painted Lady, for Aaron's house was not far from the fearsome lane that led to Double Dykes, and even the big boys who made

faces at this woman by day ran from her in the dusk. Creepy tales were told of what happened to those on whom she cast a blighting eye before they could touch cold iron, and Tommy was one of many who kept a bit of cold iron from the smithy handy in his pocket. On his way home from the readings he never had occasion to use it, but at these times he sometimes met Grizel, who liked to do her shopping in the evenings when her persecutors were more easily eluded, and he forced her to speak to him. Not her loneliness appealed to him, but that look of admiration she had given him when he was astride of Francie Crabb. For such a look he could pardon many rebuffs; without it no praise greatly pleased him; he was always on the outlook for it.

"I warrant," he said to her one evening, "you want to have some manbody to take care of you the way I take care of Elspeth."

"No, I don't," she replied, promptly.

"Would you no like somebody to love you?"

"Do you mean kissing?" she asked.

"There's better things in it than that," he said, guardedly; "but if you want kissing, I — I — Elspeth'll kiss you."

"Will she want to do it?" inquired Grizel, a little wistfully.

"I'll make her do it," Tommy said.

"I don't want her to do it," cried Grizel, and he

could not draw another word from her. However, he was sure she thought him a wonder, and when next they met he challenged her with it.

"Do you not now?"

"I won't tell you," answered Grizel, who was never known to lie.

"You think I'm a wonder," Tommy persisted, "but you dinna want me to know you think it."

Grizel rocked her arms, a quaint way she had when excited, and she blurted out, "How do you know?"

The look he liked had come back to her face, but he had no time to enjoy it, for just then Elspeth appeared, and Elspeth's jealousy was easily aroused.

"I dinna ken you, lassie," he said coolly to Grizel, and left her stamping her foot at him. She decided never to speak to Tommy again, but the next time they met he took her into the Den and taught her how to fight.

It is painful to have to tell that Miss Ailie was the person who provided him with the opportunity. In the readings they arrived one evening at the scene in the conservatory, which has not a single Stroke in it, but is so full of Words We have no Concern with that Tommy reeled home blinking, and next day so disgracefully did he flounder in his lessons that the gentle schoolmistress cast up her arms in despair.

"I don't know what to say to you," she exclaimed.

"Fine I know what you want to say," he retorted, and unfortunately she asked, "What?"

"Stroke!" he replied, leering horridly.

"I Love My Love with an A" was returned to the club forthwith (whether he really did have a wife in India Miss Ailie never knew) and "Judd on the Shorter Catechism" took its place. But mark the result. The readings ended at a quarter to eight now, at twenty to eight, at half-past seven, and so Tommy could loiter on the way home without arousing Elspeth's suspicion. One evening he saw Grizel cutting her way through the Haggerty-Taggerty group, and he offered to come to her aid if she would say "Help me." But she refused.

When, however, the Haggerty-Taggertys were gone she condescended to say, "I shall never, never ask you to help me, but — if you like — you can show me how to hit without biting my tongue."

"I'll learn you Shovel's curly ones," replied Tommy, cordially, and he adjourned with her to the Den for that purpose. He said he chose the Den so that Corp Shiach and the others might not interrupt them, but it was Elspeth he was thinking of.

"You are like Miss Ailie with her cane when

she is pandying," he told Grizel. "You begin well, but you slacken just when you are going to hit."

"It is because my hand opens," Grizel said.

"And then it ends in a shove," said her mentor, severely. "You should close your fists like this, with the thumbs inside, and then play dab, this way, that way, yon way. That's what Shovel calls, 'You want it, take it, you've got it.'"

Thus did the hunted girl get her first lesson in scientific warfare in the Den, and neither she nor Tommy saw the pathos of it. Other lessons followed, and during the rests Grizel told Tommy all that she knew about herself. He had won her confidence at last by — by swearing dagont that he was English also.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN WHO NEVER CAME

"Is it true that your mother's a bonny swearer?"

Tommy wanted to find out all about the Painted Lady, and the best way was to ask.

"She does not always swear," Grizel said eagerly. "She sometimes says sweet, sweet things."

"What kind of things?"

"I won't tell you."

"Tell me one."

"Well, then, 'Beloved.'"

"Word We have no Concern with," murmured Tommy. He was shocked, but still curious. "Does she say 'Beloved' to you?" he inquired.

"No, she says it to him."

"Him! Wha is he?" Tommy thought he was at the beginning of a discovery, but she answered, uncomfortably:

"I don't know."

"But you've seen him?"

"No, he — he is not there."

"Not there! How can she speak to him if he's no there?"

"She thinks he is there. He — he comes on a horse."

"What is the horse like?"

"There is no horse."

"But you said——"

"She just thinks there is a horse. She hears it."

"Do you ever hear it?"

"No."

The girl was looking imploringly into Tommy's face as if begging it to say that these things need not terrify her, but what he wanted was information.

"What does the Painted Lady do," he asked, "when she thinks she hears the horse?"

"She blows kisses, and then — then she goes to the Den."

"What to do?"

"She walks up and down the Den, talking to the man."

"And him no there?" cried Tommy, scared.

"No, there is no one there."

"And syne what do you do?"

"I won't tell you."

Tommy reflected, and then he said, "She's daft."

"She is not always daft," cried Grizel. "There are whole weeks when she is just sweet."

"Then what do you make of her being so queer in the Den?"

"I am not sure, but I think — I think there was once a place like the Den at her own home in

England, where she used to meet the man long ago, and sometimes she forgets that it is not long ago now."

"I wonder wha the man was?"

"I think he was my father."

"I thought you didna ken what a father was?"

"I know now. I think my father was a Scotsman."

"What makes you think that?"

"I heard a Thrums woman say it would account for my being called Grizel, and I think we came to Scotland to look for him, but it is so long, long ago."

"How long?"

"I don't know. We have lived here four years, but we were looking for him before that. It was not in this part of Scotland we looked for him. We gave up looking for him before we came here."

"What made the Painted Lady take a house here, then?"

"I think it was because the Den is so like the place she used to meet him in long ago."

"What was his name?"

"I don't know."

"Does the Painted Lady no tell you about yoursel'?"

"No, she is angry if I ask."

"Her name is Mary, I've heard?"

"Mary Gray is her name, but — but I don't think it is her real name."

"How, does she no use her real name?"

"Because she wants her own mamma to think she is dead."

"What makes her want that?"

"I am not sure, but I think it is because there is me. I think it was naughty of me to be born. Can you help being born?"

Tommy would have liked to tell her about Reddy, but forbore, because he still believed that he had acted criminally in that affair, and so for the time being the inquisition ended. But though he had already discovered all that Grizel knew about her mother and nearly all that curious Thrums ever ferreted out, he returned to the subject at the next meeting in the Den.

"Where does the Painted Lady get her money?"

"Oh," said Grizel, "that is easy. She just goes into that house called the bank, and asks for some, and they give her as much as she likes."

"Ay, I've heard that, but——"

The remainder of the question was never uttered. Instead,

"Hod ahint a tree!" cried Tommy, hastily, and he got behind one himself; but he was too late; Elspeth was upon them; she had caught them together at last.

Tommy showed great cunning. "Pretend you

have eggs in your hand," he whispered to Grizel, and then, in a loud voice, he said: "Think shame of yoursel', lassie, for harrying birds' nests. It's a good thing I saw you, and brought you here to force you to put them back. Is that you, Elspeth? I catched this limmer wi' eggs in her hands (and the poor birds sic bonny singers, too!), and so I was forcing her to——"

But it would not do. Grizel was ablaze with indignation. "You are a horrid story-teller," she said, "and if I had known you were ashamed of being seen with me, I should never have spoken to you. Take him," she cried, giving Tommy a push toward Elspeth, "I don't want the mean little story-teller."

"He's not mean!" retorted Elspeth.

"Nor yet little!" roared Tommy.

"Yes, he is," insisted Grizel, "and I was not harrying nests. He came with me here because he wanted to."

"Just for the once," he said, hastily.

"This is the sixth time," said Grizel, and then she marched out of the Den. Tommy and Elspeth followed slowly, and not a word did either say until they were in front of Aaron's house. Then by the light in the window Tommy saw that Elspeth was crying softly, and he felt miserable.

"I was just teaching her to fight," he said humbly.

"You looked like it!" she replied, with the scorn that comes occasionally to the sweetest lady.

He tried to comfort her in various tender ways, but none of them sufficed this time. "You'll marry her as soon as you're a man," she insisted, and she would not let this tragic picture go. It was a case for his biggest efforts, and he opened his mouth to threaten instant self-destruction unless she became happy at once. But he had threatened this too frequently of late, even shown himself drawing the knife across his throat.

As usual the right idea came to him at the right moment. "If you just kent how I did it for your sake," he said, with gentle dignity, "you wouldna blame me; you would think me noble."

She would not help him with a question, and after waiting for it he proceeded. "If you just kent wha she is! And I thought she was dead! What a start it gave me when I found out it was her!"

"Wha is she?" cried Elspeth, with a sudden shiver.

"I was trying to keep it frae you," replied Tommy, sadly.

She seized his arm. "Is it Reddy?" she gasped, for the story of Reddy had been a terror to her all her days.

"She doesna ken I was the laddie that diddled her in London," he said, "and I promise you never

to let on, Elspeth. I — I just went to the Den with her to say things that would put her off the scent. If I hadna done that she might have found out and ta'en your place here and tried to pack you off to the Painted Lady's."

Elspeth stared at him, the other grief already forgotten, and he thought he was getting on excellently, when she cried with passion, "I don't believe as it is Reddie!" and ran into the house.

"Dinna believe it, then!" disappointed Tommy shouted, and now he was in such a rage with himself that his heart hardened against her. He sought the company of old Blinder.

Unfortunately Elspeth had believed it, and her woe was the more pitiful because she saw at once, what had never struck Tommy, that it would be wicked to keep Grizel out of her rights. "I'll no win to Heaven now," she said, despairingly, to herself, for to offer to change places with Grizel was beyond her courage, and she tried some childish ways of getting round God, such as going on her knees and saying, "I'm so little, and I hinna no mother!" That was not a bad way.

Another way was to give Grizel everything she had, except Tommy. She collected all her treasures, the bottle with the brass top that she had got from Shovel's old girl, the "housewife" that was a present from Miss Ailie, the teetotum, the pretty buttons Tommy had won for her at the

game of buttony, the witchy marble, the twopence she had already saved for the Muckley, these and some other precious trifles she made a little bundle of and set off for Double Dykes with them, intending to leave them at the door. This was Elspeth, who in ordinary circumstances would not have ventured near that mysterious dwelling even in daylight and in Tommy's company. There was no room for vulgar fear in her bursting little heart to-night.

Tommy went home anon, meaning to be whatever kind of boy she seemed most in need of, but she was not in the house, she was not in the garden; he called her name, and it was only Birkie Fleemister, mimicking her, who answered, "Oh, Tommy, come to me!" But Birkie had news for him.

"Sure as death," he said in some awe, "I saw Elspeth ganging yont the double dykes, and I cried to her that the Painted Lady would do her a mischief, but she just ran on."

Elspeth in the double dykes—alone—and at night! Oh, how Tommy would have liked to strike himself now! She must have believed his wicked lie after all, and being so religious she had gone to— He gave himself no time to finish the thought. The vital thing was that she was in peril, he seemed to hear her calling to him, "Oh, Tommy, come quick! oh, Tommy, oh, Tommy!"

and in an agony of apprehension he ran after her. But by the time he got to the beginning of the double dykes he knew that she must be at the end of them, and in the Painted Lady's maw, unless their repute by night had blown her back. He paused on the Coffin Brig, which is one long narrow stone; and along the funnel of the double dykes he sent the lonely whisper, "Elspeth, are you there?" He tried to shout it, but no boy could shout there after nightfall in the Painted Lady's time, and when the words had travelled only a little way along the double dykes, they came whining back to him, like a dog despatched on uncanny work. He heard no other sound save the burn stealing on tiptoe from an evil place, and the uneasy rustling of tree-tops, and his own breathing.

The Coffin Brig remains, but the double dykes have fallen bit by bit into the burn, and the path they made safe is again as naked as when the Kingoldrum Jacobites filed along it, and sweer they were, to the support of the Pretender. It traverses a ridge and is streaked with slippery beech-roots which like to fling you off your feet, on the one side into a black burn twenty feet below, on the other down a pleasant slope. The double dykes were built by a farmer fond of his dram, to stop the tongue of a water-kelpie which lived in a pool below and gave him a turn every

night he staggered home by shouting "Drunk again, Peewitbrae!" and announcing, with a smack of the lips, that it had a bed ready for him in the burn. So Peewitbrae built two parallel dykes two feet apart and two feet high, between which he could walk home like a straight man. His cunning took the heart out of the brute, and water-kelpies have not been seen near Thrums since about that time.

By day even girls played at palaulays here, and it was a favourite resort of boys, who knew that you were a man when you could stand on both dykes at once. They also stripped boldly to the skin and then looked doubtfully at the water. But at night! To test your nerves you walked alone between the double dykes, and the popular practice was to start off whistling, which keeps up the courage. At the point where you turned to run back (the Painted Lady after you, or so you thought) you dropped a marked stone, which told next day how far you had ventured. Corp Shiach long held the championship, and his stone was ostentatiously fixed in one of the dykes with lime. Tommy had suffered at his hands for saying that Shovel's mark was thirty yards farther on.

With head bent to the level of the dykes, though it was almost a mirk night beneath the trees, and one arm outstretched before him straight as an elvint, Tommy faced this fearful passage, some-

times stopping to touch cold iron, but on the whole hanging back little, for Elspeth was in peril. Soon he reached the paling that was not needed to keep boys out of the Painted Lady's garden, one of the prettiest and best tended flower-gardens in Thrums, and crawling through where some spars had fallen, he approached the door as noiseless as an Indian brave after scalps. There he crouched, with a heart that was going like a shuttle on a loom, and listened for Elspeth's voice.

On a night he had come nearly as far as this before, but in the tail of big fellows with a turnip lantern. Into the wood-work of the east window they had thrust a pin, to which a button was tied, and the button was also attached to a long string. They hunkered afar off and pulled this string, and then the button tapped the death-rap on the window, and the sport was successful, for the Painted Lady screamed. But suddenly the door opened and they were put to flight by the fierce barking of a dog. One said that the brute nabbed him in the leg, another saw the vive tongue of it, a third played lick at it with the lantern; this was before they discovered that the dog had been Grizel imitating one, brave Grizel, always ready to protect her mother, and never allowed to cherish the childish fears that were hers by birthright.

Tommy could not hear a sound from within, but he had startling proof that Elspeth was near-

His foot struck against something at the door, and, stooping, he saw that it was a little bundle of the treasures she valued most. So she had indeed come to stay with the Painted Lady if Grizel proved merciless! Oh, what a black he had been!

Though originally a farm-house, the cottage was no larger than Aaron's, and of its two front windows only one showed a light, and that through a blind. Tommy sidled round the house in the hope that the small east window would be more hospitable, and just as he saw that it was blindless something that had been crouching rose between him and it.

"Let go!" he cried, feeling the Painted Lady's talons in his neck.

"Tommy!" was the answer.

"It's you, Elspeth?"

"Is it you, Tommy?"

"Of course. Whisht!"

"But say it is."

"It is."

"Oh, Tommy, I'm so fleid!"

He drew her farther from the window and told her it had all been a wicked lie, and she was so glad that she forgot to chide him, but he denounced himself, and he was better than Elspeth even at that. However, when he learned what had brought her here he dried his eyes and skulked to the door again and brought back her belongings,

and then she wanted him to come away at once. But the window fascinated him; he knew he should never find courage to come here again, and he glided toward it, signing to Elspeth to accompany him. They were now too near Double Dykes for speaking to be safe, but he tapped his head as a warning to her to remove her hat, for a woman's head-gear always reaches a window in front of its wearer, and he touched his cold iron and passed it to her as if it were a snuff-mull. Thus fortified, they approached the window fearfully, holding hands and stepping high, like a couple in a minuet.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PAINTED LADY

It had been the ordinary dwelling room of the unknown poor, the mean little "end" — ah, no, no, the noblest chamber in the annals of the Scottish nation. Here on a hard anvil has its character been fashioned and its history made at rush-lights and its God ever most prominent. Always within reach of hands which trembled with reverence as they turned its broad page could be found the Book that is compensation for all things, and that was never more at home than on bare dressers and worm-eaten looms. If you were brought up in that place and have forgotten it, there is no more hope for you.

But though still recalling its past, the kitchen into which Tommy and Elspeth peered was trying successfully to be something else. The plate-rack had been a fixture, and the coffin-bed and the wooden bole, or board in the wall, with its round hole through which you thrust your hand when you wanted salt, and instead of a real mantelpiece there was a quaint imitation one painted over the

fireplace. There were some pieces of furniture too, such as were usual in rooms of the kind, but most of them, perhaps in ignorance, had been put to novel uses, like the plate-rack, where the Painted Lady kept her many pretty shoes instead of her crockery. Gossip said she had a looking-glass of such prodigious size that it stood on the floor, and Tommy nudged Elspeth to signify, "There it is!" Other nudges called her attention to the carpet, the spinet, a chair that rocked like a cradle, and some smaller oddities, of which the queerest was a monster velvet glove hanging on the nail that by rights belonged to the bellows. The Painted Lady always put on this glove before she would touch the coals, which diverted Tommy, who knew that common folk lift coals with their bare hands while society uses the fringe of its second petticoat.

It might have been a boudoir through which a kitchen and bedroom had wandered, spilling by the way, but though the effect was tawdry, everything had been rubbed clean by that passionate housewife, Grizel. She was on her knees at present ca'ming the hearthstone a beautiful blue, and sometimes looking round to address her mother, who was busy among her plants and cut flowers. Surely they were know-nothings who called this woman silly, and blind who said she painted. It was a little face all of one colour, dingy pale, not chubby, but retaining the soft contours of a child's face,

and the features were singularly delicate. She was clad in a soft gray, and her figure was of the smallest; there was such an air of youth about her that Tommy thought she could become a girl again by merely shortening her frock, not such a girl as gaunt Grizel, though, who would have looked a little woman had she let her frock down. In appearance indeed the Painted Lady resembled her plain daughter not at all, but in manner in a score of ways, as when she rocked her arms joyously at sight of a fresh bud or tossed her brown hair from her brow with a pretty gesture that ought, God knows, to have been for some man to love. The watchers could not hear what she and Grizel said, but evidently it was pleasant converse, and mother and child, happy in each other's company, presented a picture as sweet as it is common, though some might have complained that they were doing each other's work. But the Painted Lady's delight in flowers was a scandal in Thrums, where she would stand her ground if the roughest boy approached her with roses in his hand, and she gave money for them, which was one reason why the people thought her daft. She was tending her flowers now with experienced eye, smelling them daintily, and every time she touched them it was a caress.

The watchers retired into the field to compare impressions, and Elspeth said emphatically, "I like her, Tommy, I'm not none fleid at her."

Tommy had liked her also, but being a man he said, "You forget that she's an ill one."

"She looks as if she didna ken that hersel'," answered Elspeth, and these words of a child are the best picture we can hope to get of the Painted Lady.

On their return to the window, they saw that Grizel had finished her ca'ming and was now sitting on the floor nursing a doll. Tommy had not thought her the kind to shut her eyes to the truth about dolls, but she was hugging this one passionately. Without its clothes it was of the nine-pin formation, and the painted eyes and mouth had been incorporated long since in loving Grizel's system; but it became just sweet as she swaddled it in a long yellow frock and slipped its bullet head into a duck of a pink bonnet. These articles of attire and the others that you begin with had all been made by Grizel herself out of the coloured tissue-paper that shopkeepers wrap round brandy-bottles. The doll's name was Griselda, and it was exactly six months old, and Grizel had found it, two years ago, lying near the Coffin Brig, naked and almost dead.

It was making the usual fuss at having its clothes put on, and Grizel had to tell it frequently that of all the babies — which shamed it now and again, but kept her so occupied that she forgot her mother. The Painted Lady had sunk into the

rocking-chair, and for a time she amused herself with it, but by and by it ceased to rock, and as she sat looking straight before her a change came over her face. Elspeth's hand tightened its clutch on Tommy's; the Painted Lady had begun to talk to herself.

She was not speaking aloud, for evidently Grizel, whose back was toward her, heard nothing, but her lips moved and she nodded her head and smiled and beckoned, apparently to the wall, and the childish face rapidly became vacant and foolish. This mood passed, and now she was sitting very still, only her head moving, as she looked in apprehension and perplexity this way and that, like one who no longer knew where she was, nor who was the child by the fire. When at last Grizel turned and observed the change, she may have sighed, but there was no fear in her face; the fear was on the face of her mother, who shrank from her in unmistakable terror and would have screamed at a harsh word or a hasty movement. Grizel seemed to know this, for she remained where she was, and first she nodded and smiled reassuringly to her mother, and then, leaning forward, took her hand and stroked it softly and began to talk. She had laid aside her doll, and with the act become a woman again.

The Painted Lady was soothed, but her bewildered look came and went, as if she only caught

at some explanation Grizel was making, to lose it in a moment. Yet she seemed most eager to be persuaded. The little watchers at this queer play saw that Grizel was saying things to her which she repeated docilely and clung to and lost hold of. Often Grizel illustrated her words by a sort of pantomime, as when she sat down on a chair and placed the doll in her lap, then sat down on her mother's lap; and when she had done this several times Tommy took Elspeth into the field to say to her:

"Do you no see? She means as she is the Painted Lady's bairn, just the same as the doll is her bairn."

If the Painted Lady needed to be told this every minute she was daft indeed, and Elspeth could peer no longer at the eerie spectacle. To leave Tommy, however, was equally difficult, so she crouched at his feet when he returned to the window, drawn there hastily by the sound of music.

The Painted Lady could play on the spinet beautifully, but Grizel could not play, though it was she who was trying to play now. She was running her fingers over the notes, producing noises from them, while she swayed grotesquely on her seat and made comic faces. Her object was to capture her mother's mind, and she succeeded for a short time, but soon it floated away from all control, and the Painted Lady fell a-shaking violently.

Then Grizel seemed to be alarmed, and her arms rocked despairingly, but she went to her mother and took loving hold of her, and the woman clung to her child in a way pitiful to see. She was on Grizel's knee now, but she still shivered as if in a deadly chill, and her feet rattled on the floor, and her arms against the sides of the chair. Grizel pinned the trembling arms with her own and twisted her legs round her mother's, and still the Painted Lady's tremors shook them both, so that to Tommy they were as two people wrestling.

The shivering slowly lessened and at last ceased, but this seemed to make Grizel no less unhappy. To her vehement attempt to draw her mother's attention she got no response; the Painted Lady was hearkening intently for some sound other than Grizel's voice, and only once did she look at her child. Then it was with cruel, ugly eyes, and at the same moment she shoved Grizel aside so viciously that it was almost a blow. Grizel sat down sorrowfully beside her doll, like one aware that she could do no more, and her mother at once forgot her. What was she listening for so eagerly? Was it for the gallop of a horse? Tommy strained his ears.

"Elspeth—speak low—do you hear anything?"

"No; I'm ower fleid to listen."

"Whisht! do you no hear a horse?"

"No, everything's terrible still. Do you hear a horse?"

"I—I think I do, but far awa'."

His imagination was on fire. Did he hear a distant galloping or did he only make himself hear it? He had bent his head, and Elspeth, looking affrighted into his face, whispered, "I hear it too, oh, Tommy, so do I!"

And the Painted Lady had heard it. She kissed her hand toward the Den several times, and each time Tommy seemed to hear that distant galloping. All the sweetness had returned to her face now, and with it a surging joy, and she rocked her arms exultantly, but quickly controlled them lest Grizel should see. For evidently Grizel must be cheated, and so the Painted Lady became very sly. She slipped off her shoes to be able to make her preparations noiselessly, and though at all other times her face expressed the rapture of love, when she glanced at her child it was suspiciously and with a gleam of hatred. Her preparations were for going out. She was long at the famous mirror, and when she left it her hair was elaborately dressed and her face so transformed that first Tommy exclaimed "Bonny!" and then corrected himself with a scornful "Paint!" On her feet she put a foolish little pair of red shoes, on her head a hat too gay with flowers, and across her shoulders a flimsy white shawl at which the night air of Thrums would laugh. Her every movement was light and cautious and accompanied by side-glances

at Grizel, who occasionally looked at her, when the Painted Lady immediately pretended to be tending her plants again. She spoke to Grizel sweetly to deceive her, and shot baleful glances at her next moment. Tommy saw that Grizel had taken up her doll once more and was squeezing it to her breast. She knew very well what was going on behind her back.

Suddenly Tommy took to his heels, Elspeth after him. He had seen the Painted Lady coming on her tiptoes to the window. They saw the window open and a figure in a white shawl creep out of it, as she had doubtless escaped long ago by another window when the door was barred. They lost sight of her at once.

"What will Grizel do now?" Tommy whispered, and he would have returned to his watching place, but Elspeth pointed to the window. Grizel was there closing it, and next moment the lamp was extinguished. They heard a key turn in the lock, and presently Grizel, carrying warm wraps, passed very near them and proceeded along the double dykes, not anxious apparently to keep her mother in view, but slowly, as if she knew where to find her. She went into the Den, where Tommy dared not follow her, but he listened at the stile and in the awful silence he fancied he heard the neighing of a horse.

The next time he met Grizel he was yearning

to ask her how she spent that night, but he knew she would not answer; it would be a long time before she gave him her confidence again. He offered her his piece of cold iron, however, and explained why he carried it, whereupon she flung it across the road, crying, "You horrid boy, do you think I am frightened at my mamma!" But when he was out of sight she came back and slipped the cold iron into her pocket.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH TOMMY SOLVES THE WOMAN PROBLEM

Pity made Elspeth want to like the Painted Lady's child now, but her own rules of life were all from a book never opened by Grizel, who made her religion for herself and thought God a swear; she also despised Elspeth for being so dependent on Tommy, and Elspeth knew it. The two great subjects being barred thus, it was not likely that either girl, despite some attempts on Elspeth's part, should find out the best that was in the other, without which friendship has no meaning, and they would have gone different ways had not Tommy given an arm to each. He, indeed, had as little in common with Grizel, for most conspicuous of his traits was the faculty of stepping into other people's shoes and remaining there until he became someone else; his individuality consisted in having none, while she could only be herself and was without tolerance for those who were different; he had at no time in his life the least desire to make other persons like himself, but if they were not like Grizel she rocked her arms

and cried, "Why, why, why?" which is the mark of the "womanly" woman. But his tendency to be anyone he was interested in implied enormous sympathy (for the time being), and though Grizel spurned his overtures, this only fired his pride of conquest. We can all get whatever we want if we are quite determined to have it (though it be a king's daughter), and in the end Tommy vanquished Grizel. How? By offering to let her come into Aaron's house and wash it and dust it and ca'm it, "just as if you were our mother," an invitation she could not resist. To you this may seem an easy way, but consider the penetration he showed in thinking of it. It came to him one day when he saw her lift the smith's baby out of the gutter, and hug it with a passionate delight in babies.

"She's so awid to do it," he said basely to Elspeth, "that we needna let on how much we want it done." And he also mentioned her eagerness to Aaron as a reason why she should be allowed to do it for nothing.

For Aaron to hold out against her admittance would have been to defraud himself, for she transformed his house. When she saw the brass lining of the jelly-pan discoloured, and that the stockings hanging from the string beneath the mantelpiece had given way where the wearers were hardest on them; when she found dripping adhering to a cold

frying-pan instead of in a "pig," and the pitcher leaking and the carrot-grater stopped — when these and similar discoveries were made by Grizel, was it a squeal of horror she gave that such things should be, or a cry of rapture because to her had fallen the task of setting them right?

"She just made a jump for the besom," was Tommy's graphic description of how it all began.

You should have seen Grizel on the hoddy-table knocking nails into the wall. The hoddy-table is so called because it goes beneath the larger one at night, like a chicken under its mother, and Grizel, with the nails in her mouth, used them up so quickly that you would have sworn she swallowed half of them; yet she rocked her arms because she could not be at all four walls at once. She rushed about the room until she was dizzy, and Tommy knew the moment to cry "Grip her, she'll tumble!" when he and Elspeth seized her and put her on a stool.

It is on the hoddy-table that you bake and iron. "There's not a baking-board in the house," Elspeth explained. "There is!" cried Grizel, there and then converting a drawer into one.

Between her big bannocks she made baby ones, for no better reason than that she was so fond of babies, and she kissed the baby ones and said, "Oh, the loves, they are just sweet!" and she felt for them when Tommy took a bite. She could

go so quickly between the board and the girdle that she was always at one end of the course or the other, but never gave you time to say at which end, and on the limited space round the fire she could balance such a number of bannocks that they were as much a wonder as the Lord's prayer written on a sixpence. Such a vigilant eye she kept on them, too, that they dared not fall. Yet she had never been taught to bake; a good-natured neighbour had now and again allowed her to look on.

Then her ironing! Even Aaron opened his mouth on this subject, Blinder being his confidant. "I thought there was a smell o' burning," he said, "and so I went butt the house; but man, as soon as my een lighted on her I minded of my mother at the same job. The crittur was so busy with her work that she looked as if, though the last trumpet had blawn, she would just have cried, 'I canna come till my ironing's done!' Ay, I went ben without a word."

But best of all was to see Grizel "redding up" on a Saturday afternoon. Where were Tommy and Elspeth then? They were shut up in the coffin-bed to be out of the way, and could scarce have told whether they fled thither or were wrapped into it by her energetic arms. Even Aaron dared not cross the floor until it was sanded. "I believe," he said, trying to jest, "you would like to

shut me up in the bed too!" "I should just love it," she cried, eagerly; "will you go?" It is an inferior woman who has a sense of humour when there is a besom in her hand.

Thus began great days to Grizel, "sweet" she called them, for she had many of her mother's words, and a pretty way of emphasizing them with her plain face that turned them all into superlatives. But though Tommy and Elspeth were her friends now, her mouth shut obstinately the moment they mentioned the Painted Lady; she regretted ever having given Tommy her confidence on that subject, and was determined not to do so again. He did not dare tell her that he had once been at the east window of her home, but often he and Elspeth spoke to each other of that adventure, and sometimes they woke in their garret bed thinking they heard the horseman galloping by. Then they crept closer to each other, and wondered whether Grizel was cosey in her bed or stalking an eerie figure in the Den.

Aaron said little, but he was drawn to the girl, who had not the self-consciousness of Tommy and Elspeth in his presence, and sometimes he slipped a penny into her hand. The pennies were not spent, they were hoarded for the fair, or Muckle Friday, or Muckley, great day of the year in Thrums. If you would know how Tommy was making ready for this mighty festival, listen.

One of his sources of income was the *Mentor*, a famous London weekly paper, which seemed to visitors to be taken in by every person of position in Thrums. It was to be seen not only in parlours, but on the armchair at the Jute Bank, in the gauger's gig, in the Spittal factor's dog-cart, on a shoemaker's form, protruding from Dr. McQueen's tail pocket and from Mr. Duthie's oxter pocket, on Cathro's school-desk, in the Rev. Mr. Dishart's study, in half a dozen farms. Miss Ailie compelled her little servant, Gavinia, to read the *Mentor*, and stood over her while she did it; the phrase, "this week's," meant this week's *Mentor*. Yet the secret must be told: only one copy of the paper came to Thrums weekly; it was subscribed for by the whole reading public between them, and by Miss Ailie's influence Tommy had become the boy who carried it from house to house.

This brought him a penny a week, but so heavy were his incidental expenses that he could have saved little for the Muckley had not another organization given him a better chance. It was a society, newly started, for helping the deserving poor; they had to subscribe not less than a penny weekly to it, and at the end of the year each subscriber was to be given fuel, etc., to the value of double what he or she had put in. "The three Ps" was a nickname given to the society by Dr. McQueen, because it claimed to distribute "Peats

and Potatoes with Propriety," but he was one of its heartiest supporters nevertheless. The history of this society in the first months of its existence not only shows how Tommy became a moneyed man, but gives a glimpse into the character of those it benefited.

Miss Ailie was treasurer, and the pennies were to be brought to her on Monday evenings between the hours of seven and eight. The first Monday evening found her ready in the school-room, in her hand the famous pencil that wrote red with the one end and blue with the other; by her side her assistant, Mr. T. Sandys, a pen balanced on his ear. For a whole hour did they wait, but though many of the worthiest poor had been enrolled as members, the few who appeared with their pennies were notoriously riff-raff. At eight Miss Ailie disconsolately sent Tommy home, but he was back in five minutes.

"There's a mask of them," he told her, excitedly, "hanging about, but feared to come in because the others would see them. They're ashamed to have it kent that they belong to a charity society, and Meggy Robbie is wandering round the Dovecot wi' her penny wrapped in a paper, and Watty Rattray and Ronny-On is walking up and down the brae pretending they dinna ken one another, and auld Connacher's Jeanie Ann says she has been four times round the town waiting for Kitty

Elshioner to go away, and there's a one-leggit man hodding in the ditch, and Tibbie Birse is out wi' a lantern counting them."

Miss Ailie did not know what to do. "Here's Jeanie Ann's penny," Tommy continued, opening his hand, "and this is three bawbees frae Kitty Elshioner and you and me is no to tell a soul they've joined."

A furtive tapping was heard at the door. It was Ronny-On, who had skulked forward with twopence, but Gavinia answered his knock, so he just said, "Ay, Gavinia, it's yoursel'. Well, I'll be stepping," and would have retired had not Miss Ailie caught him. Even then he said, "Three bawbees is to you to lay by, and one bawbee to Gavinia no to tell."

To next Monday evening Miss Ailie now looked with apprehension, but Tommy lay awake that night until, to use a favourite crow of his, he "found a way." He borrowed the school-mistress's blue-and-red pencil and sought the houses of the sensitive poor with the following effect. One sample will suffice; take him at the door of Meggy Robbie in the West Muir, which he flung open with the effrontery of a tax-collector.

"You're a three P," he said, with a wave of his pencil.

"I'm no sic thing!" cried the old lady.

"It winna do, woman," Tommy said sternly.

"Miss Ailie telled me you paid in your first penny on the chap of ten." He wetted the pencil on his tongue to show that it was vain to trifle with him, and Meggy bowed her head.

"It'll be through the town that I've joined," she moaned, but Tommy explained that he was there to save her.

"I'm willing to come to your house," he said, "and collect the money every week, and not a soul will I tell except the committee."

"Kitty Elshioner would see you coming," said Meggy.

"No, no, I'll creep yont the hedge and climb the hen-house."

"But it would be a' found out at any rate," she remembered, "when I go for the peats and things at Hogmanay."

"It needna be," eagerly replied Tommy. "I'll bring them to you in a barrow in the dead o' night."

"Could you?" she cried passionately, and he promised he would, and it may be mentioned here that he did.

"And what for yoursel'?" she inquired.

"A bawbee," he said, "the night afore the Muckley."

The bargain was made, but before he could get away, "Tell me, laddie," said Meggy, coaxingly, "has Kitty Elshioner joined?" They were all as curious to know who had joined as they were

anxious to keep their own membership a secret; but Tommy betrayed none, at least none who agreed to his proposal. There were so many of these that on the night before the Muckley he had thirteen pence.

"And you was doing good all the time you was making the thirteen pence," Elspeth said, fondly. "I believe that was the reason you did it."

"I believe it was!" Tommy exclaimed. He had not thought of this before, but it was easy to him to believe anything.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MUCKLEY

Every child in Thrums went to bed on the night before the Muckley hugging a pirly, or, as the vulgar say, a money-box; and all the pirlies were ready for to-morrow, that is to say, the mouths of them had been widened with gully knives by owners now so skilful at the jerk which sends their contents to the floor that pirlies they were no longer. "Disgorge!" was the universal cry, or, in the vernacular, "Out you come, you sweer deevils!"

Not a coin but had its history, not a boy who was unable to pick out his own among a hundred. The black one came from the 'Sosh, the bent lad he got for carrying in Ronny-On's sticks. Oh michty me, sure as death he had nearly forgotten the one with the warts on it. Which to spend first? The goldy one? Na faags, it was ower ill to come by. The scartit one? No, no, it was a lucky. Well, then, the one found in the rat's hole? (That was a day!) Ay, dagont, ay, we'll make the first blatter with it.

It was Tommy's first Muckley, and the report

that he had thirteen pence brought him many advisers about its best investment. Even Corp Shiach (fivepence) suspended hostilities for this purpose. "Mind this," he said solemnly, "there's none o' the candies as sucks so long as Californy's Teuch and Tasty. Other kinds may be sweeter, but Teuch and Tasty lasts the longest, and what a grip it has! It pulls out your teeth!" Corp seemed to think that this was a recommendation.

"I'm nane sure o' Teuch and Tasty," Birkie said. "If you dinna keep a watch on it, it slips ower when you're swallowing your spittle."

"Then you should tie a string to it," suggested Tommy, who was thought more of from that hour.

Beware of Pickpockets! Had it not been for placards with this glorious announcement (it is the state's first printed acknowledgment that boys and girls form part of the body politic) you might have thought that the night before the Muckley was absurdly like other nights. Not a show had arrived, not a strange dog, no romantic figures were wandering the streets in search of lodgings, no stands had sprung up in the square. You could pass hours in pretending to fear that when the morning came there would be no fairyland. And all the time you *knew*.

About ten o'clock Ballingall's cat was observed washing its face, a deliberate attempt to bring on rain. It was immediately put to death.

Tommy and Elspeth had agreed to lie awake all night; if Tommy nipped Elspeth, Elspeth would nip Tommy. Other children had made the same arrangement, though the experienced ones were aware that it would fail. If it was true that all the witches were dead, then the streets of stands and shows and gaming-tables and shooting-galleries were erected by human hands, and it followed that were you to listen through the night you must hear the hammers. But always in the watches the god of the Muckley came unseen and glued your eyes, as if with Teuch and Tasty, and while you slept — Up you woke with a start. What was it you were to mind as soon as you woke? Listen! That's a drum beating! It's the Muckley! They are all here! It has begun! Oh, michty, michty, michty, whaur's my breeks?

When Tommy, with Elspeth and Grizel, set off excitedly for the town, the country-folk were already swarming in. The Monypenny road was thick with them, braw loons in blue bonnets with red bobs to them, tartan waistcoats, scarves of every colour, woollen shirts as gay, and the strutting wearers in two minds — whether to take off the scarf to display the shirt, or hide the shirt and trust to the scarf. Came lassies, too, in wincey bodices they were like to burst through, and they were listening apprehensively as they ploughed onward for a tearing at the seams. There were

red-headed lasses, yellow-chy-headed and black-headed, blue-shawled and red-shawled lasses; boots on every one of them, stockings almost as common, the skirt kilted up for the present, but down it should go when they were in the thick of things, and then it must take care of itself. All were solemn and sheepish as yet, but wait a bit.

The first-known face our three met was Corp. He was only able to sign to them, because Californy's specialty had already done its work and glued his teeth together. He was off to the smithy to be melted, but gave them to understand that though awkward it was glorious. Then came Birkie, who had sewn up the mouths of his pockets, all but a small slit in each, as a precaution against pickpockets, and was now at his own request being held upside down by the Haggerty-Taggertys on the chance that a half-penny which had disappeared mysteriously might fall out. A more tragic figure was Francie Crabb (one and sevenpence), who, like a mad, mad thing, had taken all his money to the fair at once. In ten minutes he had bought fourteen musical instruments.

Tommy and party had not yet reached the celebrated corner of the west town end where the stands began, but they were near it, and he stopped to give Grizel and Elspeth his final instructions: "(1) Keep your money in your purse, and your

purse in your hand, and your hand in your pocket; (2) if you lose me, I'll give Shovel's whistle, and syne you maun squeeze and birse your way back to me."

Now then, are you ready? Bang! They were in it. Strike up, ye fiddlers; drums, break; tooters, fifers, at it for your lives; trumpets, blow; bagpipes, skirl; music-boxes, all together now—Tommy has arrived.

Even before he had seen Thrums, except with his mother's eye, Tommy knew that the wise begin the Muckley by measuring its extent. That the square and adjoining wynds would be crammed was a law of nature, but boyhood drew imaginary lines across the Roods, the west town end, the east town end, and the brae, and if the stands did not reach these there had been retrogression. Tommy found all well in two quarters, got a nasty shock on the brae, but medicine for it in the Roods; on the whole, yelled a hundred children, by way of greeting to each other, a better Muckley than ever.

From those who loved them best, the more notable Muckleys got distinctive names for convenience of reference. As shall be ostentatiously shown in its place, there was a Muckley called (and by Corp Shiach, too) after Tommy, but this, his first, was dubbed Sewster's Muckley, in honour of a seamstress who hanged herself that day in the

Three-cornered Wood. Poor little sewster, she had known joyous Muckleys too, but now she was up in the Three-cornered Wood hanging herself, aged nineteen. I know nothing more of her, except that in her maiden days when she left the house her mother always came to the door to look proudly after her.

How to describe the scene, when owing to the throng a boy could only peer at it between legs or through the crook of a woman's arm? Shovel would have run up ploughmen to get his bird's-eye view, and he could have told Tommy what he saw, and Tommy could have made a picture of it in his mind, every figure ten feet high. But perhaps to be lost in it was best. You had but to dive and come up anywhere to find something amazing; you fell over a box of jumping-jacks into a new world.

Everyone to his taste. If you want Tommy's sentiments, here they are, condensed: "The shows surpass everything else on earth. Four streets of them in the square! The best is the menagerie, because there is the loudest roaring there. Kick the caravans and you increase the roaring. Admission, however, prohibitive (threepence). More economical to stand outside the show of the 'Mountain Maid and the Shepherd's Bride' and watch the merriman saying funny things to the monkey. Take care you don't get in front of the steps, else

you will be pressed up by those behind and have to pay before you have decided that you want to go in. When you fling pennies at the Mountain Maid and the Shepherd's Bride they stop play-acting and scramble for them. Go in at night when there are drunk ploughmen to fling pennies. The Fat Wife with the Golden Locks lets you put your fingers in her arms, but that is soon over. 'The Slave-driver and his Victims.' Not worth the money; they are not blooding. To Jerusalem and Back in a Jiffy. This is a swindle. You just keek through holes."

But Elspeth was of a different mind. She liked To Jerusalem and Back best, and gave the Slave-driver and his Victims a penny to be Christians. The only show she disliked was the wax-work, where was performed the "Tragedy of Tiffano and the Haughty Princess." Tiffano loved the woodman's daughter, and so he would not have the Haughty Princess, and so she got a magician to turn him into a pumpkin, and then she ate him. What distressed Elspeth was that Tiffano could never get to heaven now, and all the consolation Tommy, doing his best, could give her was, "He could go, no doubt he could go, but he would have to take the Haughty Princess wi' him, and he would be sweer to do that."

Grizel reflected: "If I had a whip like the one the Slave-driver has shouldn't I lash the boys who

hoot my mamma! I wish I could turn boys into pumpkins. The Mountain Maid wore a beautiful muslin with gold lace, but she does not wash her neck."

Lastly, let Corp have his say: "I looked at the outside of the shows, but always landed back at Californy's stand. Sucking is better nor near anything. The Teuch and Tasty is stickier than ever. I have lost twa teeth. The Mountain Maid is biding all night at Tibbie Birse's, and I went in to see her. She had a bervie and a boiled egg to her tea. She likes her eggs saft wi' a lick of butter in them. The Fat Wife is the one I like best. She's biding wi' Shilpit Kaytherine on the Tanage Brae. She weighs Jeems and Kaytherine and the sma' black swine. She had an ingin to her tea. The Slave-driver's a fushinless body. One o' the Victims gives him his licks. They a' bide in the caravan. You can stand on the wheel and keek in. They had herrings wi' the rans to their tea. I cut a hole in Jerusalem and Back, and there was no Jerusalem there. The man as ocht Jerusalem greets because the Fair Circassian winna take him. He's biding a' night wi' Blinder. He likes a dram in his tea."

Elspeth's money lasted till four o'clock. For Aaron, almost the only man in Thrums who shunned the revels that day, she bought a gingerbread house; and the miraculous powder which

must be taken on a sixpence was to make Blinder see again, but unfortunately he forgot about putting it on the sixpence. And of course there was something for a certain boy. Grizel had completed her purchases by five o'clock, when Tommy was still heavy with threepence halfpenny. They included a fluffy pink shawl, she did not say for whom, but the Painted Lady wore it afterwards, and for herself another doll.

"But that doll's leg is broken," Tommy pointed out.

"That was why I bought it," she said warmly, "I feel so sorry for it, the darling," and she carried it carefully so that the poor thing might suffer as little pain as possible.

Twice they rushed home for hasty meals, and were back so quickly that Tommy's shadow strained a muscle in turning with him. Night came on, and from a hundred strings stretched along stands and shows there now hung thousands of long tin things like trumpets. One burning paper could set a dozen of these ablaze, and no sooner were they lit than a wind that had been biding its time rushed in like the merriman, making the lamps swing on their strings, so that the flaring lights embraced, and from a distance Thrums seemed to be on fire.

Even Grizel was willing to hold Tommy's hand now, and the three could only move this way and that as the roaring crowd carried them. They

were not looking at the Muckley, they were part of it, and at last Thrums was all Tommy's fancy had painted it. This intoxicated him, so that he had to scream at intervals, "We're here, Elspeth, I tell you, we're here!" and he became pugnacious and he asked youths twice his size whether they denied that he was here, and if so, would they come on. In this frenzy he was seen by Miss Ailie, who had stolen out in a veil to look for Gavinia, but just as she was about to reprove him, dreadful men asked her was she in search of a lad, whereupon she fled home and barred the door, and later in the evening warned Gavinia, through the key-hole, taking her for a roystering blade, that there were policemen in the house, to which the astounding reply of Gavinia, then aged twelve, was, "No sic luck."

With the darkness, too, crept into the Muckley certain devils in the colour of the night who spoke thickly and rolled braw lads in the mire, and egged on friends to fight and cast lewd thoughts into the minds of the women. At first the men had been bashful swains. To the women's "Gie me my faring, Jock," they had replied, "Wait, Jean, till I'm fee'd," but by night most had got their arles, with a dram above it, and he who could only guffaw at Jean a few hours ago had her round the waist now, and still an arm free for rough play with other kimmers. The Jeans were as boister-

ous as the Jocks, giving them leer for leer, running from them with a giggle, waiting to be caught and rudely kissed. Grand, patient, long-suffering fellows these men were, up at five, summer and winter, foddering their horses, maybe hours before there would be food for themselves, miserably paid, housed like cattle, and when the rheumatism seized them, liable to be flung aside like a broken graip. As hard was the life of the women: coarse food, chaff beds, damp clothes, their portion; their sweethearts in the service of masters who were reluctant to fee a married man. Is it to be wondered that these lads who could be faithful unto death drank soddenly on their one free day, that these girls, starved of opportunities for womanliness, of which they could make as much as the finest lady, sometimes woke after a Muckley to wish that they might wake no more?

Our three brushed shoulders with the devils that had been let loose, but hardly saw them; they heard them, but did not understand their tongue. The eight-o'clock bell had rung long since, and though the racket was as great as ever, it was only because every reveller left now made the noise of two. Mothers were out fishing for their bairns. The Haggerty-Taggertys had straggled home hoarse as crows; every one of them went to bed that night with a stocking round his throat. Of Monypenny boys, Tommy could find none in the

square but Corp, who, with another tooth missing, had been going about since six o'clock with his pockets hanging out, as a sign that all was over. An awkward silence had fallen on the trio; the reason, that Tommy had only threepence left and the smallest of them cost threepence. The reference of course is to the wondrous gold-paper packets of sweets (not unlike crackers in appearance) which are only seen at the Muckley, and are what every girl claims of her lad or lads. Now, Tommy had vowed to Elspeth — But he had also said to Grizel — In short, how could he buy for both with threepence?

Grizel, as the stranger, ought to get — But he knew Elspeth too well to believe that she would dry her eyes with that.

Elspeth being his sister — But he had promised Grizel, and she had been so ill brought up that she said nasty things when you broke your word.

The gold packet was bought. That is it sticking out of Tommy's inside pocket. The girls saw it and knew what was troubling him, but not a word was spoken now between the three. They set off for home self-consciously, Tommy the least agitated on the whole, because he need not make up his mind for another ten minutes. But he wished Grizel would not look at him sideways and then rock her arms in irritation. They passed many merry-makers homeward bound, many of them

following a tortuous course, for the Scottish toper gives way first in the legs, the Southron in the other extremity, and thus between them could be constructed a man wholly sober and another as drunk as Chloe. But though the highway clattered with many feet, not a soul was in the double dykes, and at the easy end of that formidable path Grizel came to a determined stop.

"Good-night," she said, with such a disdainful glance at Tommy.

He had not made up his mind yet, but he saw that it must be done now, and to take a decisive step was always agony to him, though once taken it ceased to trouble. To dodge it for another moment he said, weakly: "Let's — let's sit down a whiley on the dyke."

But Grizel, while coveting the packet, because she had never got a present in her life, would not shilly-shally. "Are you to give it to Elspeth?" she asked, with the horrid directness that is so trying to an intellect like Tommy's.

"N-no," he said.

"To Grizel?" cried Elspeth.

"N-no," he said again.

It was an undignified moment for a great boy, but the providence that watched over Tommy until it tired of him came to his aid in the nick of time. It took the form of the Painted Lady, who appeared suddenly out of the gloom of the Double

Dykes. Two of the children jumped, and the third clenched her little fists to defend her mamma if Tommy cast a word at her. But he did not; his mouth remained foolishly open. The Painted Lady had been talking cheerfully to herself, but she drew back apprehensively, with a look of appeal on her face, and then — and then Tommy "saw a way." He handed her the gold packet. "It's to you," he said, "it's — it's your Muckley!"

For a moment she was afraid to take it, but when she knew that this sweet boy's gift was genuine, she fondled it and was greatly flattered, and dropped him the quaintest courtesy and then looked defiantly at Grizel. But Grizel did not take it from her. Instead, she flung her arms impulsively round Tommy's neck, she was so glad, glad, glad.

As Tommy and Elspeth walked away to their home, Elspeth could hear him breathing heavily, and occasionally he gave her a furtive glance.

"Grizel needna have done that," she said, sharply.

"No," replied Tommy.

"But it was noble of you," she continued, squeezing his hand, "to give it to the Painted Lady. Did you mean to give it to her a' the time?"

"Oh, Elspeth!"

"But did you?"

"Oh, Elspeth!"

"That's no you greeting, is it?" she asked, softly.

"I'm near the greeting," he said truthfully, "but I'm no sure what about." His sympathy was so easily aroused that he sometimes cried without exactly knowing why.

"It's because you're so good," Elspeth told him; but presently she said, with a complete change of voice, "No, Grizel needna have done that."

"It was a shameful thing to do," Tommy agreed, shaking his head. "But she did it!" he added, triumphantly; "you saw her do it, Elspeth!"

"But you didna like it?" Elspeth asked, in terror.

"No, of course I didna like it, but—"

"But what, Tommy?"

"But I liked her to like it," he admitted, and by and by he began to laugh hysterically. "I'm no sure what I'm laughing at," he said, "but I think it's at mysel'." He may have laughed at himself before, but this Muckley is memorable as the occasion on which he first caught himself doing it. The joke grew with the years, until sometimes he laughed in his most emotional moments, suddenly seeing himself in his true light. But it had become a bitter laugh by that time.

CHAPTER XIX

CORP IS BROUGHT TO HEEL — GRIZEL DEFIANT

Corp Shiach was a bare-footed colt of a boy, of ungainly build, with a nose so thick and turned up that it was a certificate of character, and his hands were covered with warts, which he had a trick of biting till they bled. Then he rubbed them on his trousers, which were the picturesque part of him, for he was at present "serving" to the masons (he had "earned his keep" since long before he could remember), and so wore the white or yellow ducks which the dust of the quarry stains a rarer orange colour than is known elsewhere. The orange of the masons' trousers, the blue of the hearth-stones, these are the most beautiful colours to be seen in Thrums, though of course Corp was unaware of it. He was really very good-natured, and only used his fists freely because of imagination he had none, and thinking made him sweat, and consequently the simplest way of proving his case was to say, "I'll fight you." What might have been the issue of a conflict between him and Shovel was a problem for Tommy to puzzle over. Shovel was as quick as Corp was deliberate, and

would have danced round him, putting in unexpected ones, but if he had remained just one moment too long within Corp's reach ——

They nicknamed him Corp because he took fits, when he lay like one dead. He was proud of his fits, was Corp, but they were a bother to him, too, because he could make so little of them. They interested doctors and other carriage folk, who came to his aunt's house to put their fingers into him, and gave him sixpence, and would have given him more, but when they pressed him to tell them what he remembered about his fits, he could only answer dejectedly, "Not a damned thing."

"You might as well no have them ava," his wrathful aunt, with whom he lived, would say, and she thrashed him until his size forbade it.

Soon after the Muckley came word that the Lady of the Spittal was to be brought to see Corp by Mr. Ogilvy, the school-master of Glen Quharity, and at first Corp boasted of it, but as the appointed day drew near he became uneasy.

"The worst o't," he said to anyone who would listen, "is that my auntie is to be away frae hame, and so they'll put a' their questions to me."

The Haggerty-Taggertys and Birkie were so jealous that they said they were glad *they* never had fits, but Tommy made no such pretence.

"Oh, Corp, if I had thae fits of yours!" he exclaimed greedily.

"If they were mine to give awa'," replied Corp sullenly, "you could have them and welcome." Grown meek in his trouble, he invited Tommy to speak freely, with the result that his eyes were partially opened to the superiority of that boy's attainments. Tommy told him a number of interesting things to say to Mr. Ogilvy and the lady about his fits, about how queer he felt just before they came on, and the visions he had while he was lying stiff. But though the admiring Corp gave attentive ear, he said hopelessly, next day, "Not a dagont thing do I mind. When they question me about my fits I'll just say I'm sometimes in them and sometimes out o' them, and if they badger me more, I can aye kick."

Tommy gave him a look that meant, "Fits are just wasted on you," and Corp replied with another that meant, "I ken they are." Then they parted, one of them to reflect.

"Corp," he said excitedly, when next they met, "has Mr. Ogilvy or the lady ever come to see you afore?"

They had not, and Corp was able to swear that they did not even know him by sight.

"They dinna ken me either," said Tommy.

"What does that matter?" asked Corp, but Tommy was too full to speak. He had "found a way."

The lady and Mr. Ogilvy found Corp such a

success that the one gave him a shilling and the other took down his reminiscences in a note-book. But if you would hear of the rings of blue and white and yellow Corp saw, and of the other extraordinary experiences he described himself as having when in a fit, you need not search that note-book, for the page has been torn out. Instead of making inquiries of Mr. Ogilvy, try any other dominie in the district, Mr. Cathro, for instance, who delighted to tell the tale. This of course was when it leaked out that Tommy had personated Corp, by arrangement with the real Corp, who was listening in rapture beneath the bed.

Tommy, who played his part so well that he came out of it in a daze, had Corp at heel from that hour. He told him what a rogue he had been in London, and Corp cried admiringly, "Oh, you deevil! oh, you queer little deevil!" and sometimes it was Elspeth who was narrator, and then Tommy's noble acts were the subject; but still Corp's comment was "Oh, the deevil! oh, the queer little deevil!" Elspeth was flattered by his hero-worship, but his language shocked her, and after consulting Miss Ailie she advised him to count twenty when he felt an oath coming, at the end of which exercise the desire to swear would have passed away. Good-natured Corp willingly promised to try this, but he was never hopeful,

and as he explained to Tommy, after a failure, "It just made me waur than ever, for when I had counted the twenty I said a big Damn, thoughtful-like, and syne out jumpit three little damns, like as if the first ane had cleckit in my mouth."

It was fortunate that Elspeth liked Corp on the whole, for during the three years now to be rapidly passed over, Tommy took delight in his society, though he never treated him as an equal; Corp indeed did not expect that, and was humbly grateful for what he got. In summer, fishing was their great diversion. They would set off as early as four in the morning, fishing wands in hand, and scour the world for trout, plodding home in the gloaming with stones in their fishing-basket to deceive those who felt its weight. In the long winter nights they liked best to listen to Blinder's tales of the Thrums Jacobites, tales never put into writing, but handed down from father to son, and proved true in the oddest of ways, as by Blinder's trick of involuntarily holding out his hands to a fire when he found himself near one, though he might be sweating to the shirt and the time a July forenoon. "I make no doubt," he told them, "as I do that because my forebear, Buchan Osler (called Buchan wi' the Haap after the wars was ower), had to hod so lang frae the troopers, and them so greedy for him that he daredna crawl to a fire once in an eight days."

CORP IS BROUGHT TO HEEL

The Lord of the Spittal and handsome Captain Body (whose being "out" made all the women anxious) marched through the Den, flapping their wings at the head of a fearsome retinue, and the Thrums folk looked so glum at them that gay Captain Body said he should kiss every lass who did not cheer for Charlie, and none cheered, but at the same time none ran away. Few in Thrums cared a doit for Charlie, but some hung on behind this troop till there was no turning back for them, and one of these was Buchan. He forced his wife to give Captain Body a white rose from her bush by the door, but a thorn in it pricked the gallant, and the blood from his fingers fell on the bush, and from that year it grew red roses.

"If you dinna believe me," Blinder said, "look if the roses is no red on the bush at Pyotdykes, which was a split frae Buchan's, and speir whether they're no named the blood rose."

"I believe you," Tommy would say breathlessly: "go on."

Captain Body was back in the Den by and by, but he had no thought of preeing lasses' mouths now. His face was scratched and haggard and his gay coat torn, and when he crawled to the Cuttle Well he caught some of the water in his bonnet and mixed meal with it, stirring the precious compound with his finger and using the loof of his hand as a spoon. Every stick of furniture Buchan and

the other Thrums rebels possessed was seized by the government and rouped in the market-place of Thrums, but few would bid against the late owners, for whom the things were secretly bought back very cheaply.

To these and many similar stories Tommy listened open-mouthed, seeing the scene far more vividly than the narrator, who became alarmed at his quick, loud breathing, and advised him to forget them and go back to his lessons. But his lessons never interested Tommy, and he would go into the Den instead, and repeat Blinder's legends, with embellishments which made them so real that Corp and Elspeth and Grizel were afraid to look behind them lest the spectre of Captain Body should be standing there, leaning on a ghostly sword.

At such times Elspeth kept a firm grip of Tommy's hand, but one evening as they all ran panic-stricken from some imaginary alarm, she lost him near the Cuttle Well, and then, as it seemed to her, the Den became suddenly very dark and lonely. At first she thought she had it to herself, but as she stole timidly along the pink path she heard voices, and she cried "Tommy!" joyously. But no answer came, so it could not be Tommy. Then she thought it must be a pair of lovers, but next moment she stood transfixed with fear, for it was the Painted Lady, who was coming along the path talking aloud to herself. No, not

to herself — to someone she evidently thought was by her side; she called him darling and other sweet names, and waited for his replies and nodded pleased assent to them, or pouted at them, and terrified Elspeth knew that she was talking to the man who never came.

When she saw Elspeth she stopped irresolutely, and the two stood looking in fear at each other. "You are not my brat, are you?" the Painted Lady asked.

"N-no," the child gasped.

"Then why don't you call me nasty names?"

"I dinna never call you names," Elspeth replied, but the woman still looked puzzled.

"Perhaps you are naughty also?" she said doubtfully, and then, as if making up her mind that it must be so, she came closer and said, with a voice full of pity: "I am so sorry."

Elspeth did not understand half of it, but the pitying voice, which was of the rarest sweetness, drove away much of her fear, and she said: "Do you no mind me? I was wi' Tommy when he gave you the gold packet on Muckley night."

Then the Painted Lady remembered. "He took such a fancy to me," she said, with a pleased simper, and then she looked serious again.

"Do you love him?" she asked, and Elspeth nodded.

"But is he all the world to you?"

"Yes," Elspeth said.

The Painted Lady took her by the arm and said impressively, "Don't let him know."

"But he does know," said Elspeth.

"I am so sorry," the Painted Lady said again. "When they know too well, then they have no pity."

"But I want Tommy to know," Elspeth insisted.

"That is the woful thing," the Painted Lady said, rocking her arms in a way that reminded the child of Grizel. "We want them to know, we cannot help liking them to know!"

Suddenly she became confidential. "Do you think I showed my love too openly?" she asked eagerly. "I tried to hide it, you know. I covered my face with my hands, but he pulled them away, and then, of course, he knew."

She went on, "I kissed his horse's nose, and he said I did that because it was his horse. How could he know? When I asked him how he knew, he kissed me, and I pretended to be angry and ran away. But I was not angry, and I said to myself, 'I am glad, I am glad, I am glad!'

"I wanted so to be good, but — It is so difficult to refuse when you love him very much, don't you think?"

The pathos of that was lost on the girl, and the Painted Lady continued sadly: "It would be so

nice, would it not, if they liked us to be good? I think it would be sweet." She bent forward and whispered emphatically, "But they don't, you know — it bores them.

"Never bore them — and they are so easily bored! It bores them if you say you want to be married. I think it would be sweet to be married, but you should never ask for a wedding. They give you everything else, but if you say you want a wedding, they stamp their feet and go away. Why are you crying, girl? You should not cry; they don't like it. Put on your prettiest gown and laugh and pretend you are happy, and then they will tell you naughty stories and give you these." She felt her ears and looked at her fingers, on which there may once have been jewels, but there were none now.

"If you cry you lose your complexion, and then they don't love you any more. I had always such a beautiful skin. Some ladies when they lose their complexion paint. Horrid, isn't it? I wonder they can do such a thing."

She eyed Elspeth suspiciously. "But of course you might do it just a little," she said pleadingly — "just to make them go on loving you, don't you think?

"When they don't want to come any more they write you a letter, and you run with it to your room and kiss it, because you don't know what is

inside. Then you open it, and that breaks your heart, you know." She nodded her head sagaciously and smiled with tears in her eyes. "Never, never, never open the letter. Keep it unopened on your breast, and then you can always think that he may come to-morrow. And if——"

Someone was approaching, and she stopped and listened. "My brat!" she cried furiously, "she is always following me," and she poured forth a torrent of filthy abuse of Grizel, in the midst of which Tommy (for it was he) appeared and carried Elspeth off hastily. This was the only conversation either child ever had with the Painted Lady, and it bore bad fruit for Grizel. Elspeth told some of the Monypenny women about it, and they thought it their duty to point out to Aaron that the Painted Lady and her child were not desirable acquaintances for Tommy and Elspeth.

"I dinna ken," he answered sharply, "whether Tommy's a fit acquaintance for Grizel, but I'm very sure o' this, that she's more than a fit acquaintance for him. And look at what she has done for this house. I kenna what we should do if she didna come in nows and nans."

"You ken well, Aaron," they said, "that onything we could do in the way o' keeping your house in order we should do gladly."

"Thank you," he replied ungraciously, "but I would rather have her."

Nevertheless he agreed that he ought to forbid any intercourse with the Painted Lady, and unfortunately Grizel heard of this. Probably there never would have been any such intercourse; Grizel guarded against it more than anyone, for reasons she never spoke of, but she resented this veto proudly.

"Why must you not speak to my mamma?" she demanded of Tommy and Elspeth.

"Because—because she is a queer one," he said.

"She is not a queer one—she is just sweet."

He tried to evade the question by saying weakly, "We never see her to speak to at any rate, so it will make no difference. It's no as if you ever asked us to come to Double Dykes."

"But I ask you now," said Grizel, with flashing eyes.

"Oh, I darena!" cried Elspeth.

"Then I won't ever come into your house again," said Grizel decisively.

"No to redd up?" asked Tommy, incredulously. "No to bake nor to iron? You couldna help it."

"Yes I could."

"Think what you'll miss!"

Grizel might have retorted, "Think what you will miss!" but perhaps the reply she did make had a sharper sting in it. "I shall never come again," she said, loftily, "and my reason for not

coming is that — that my mamma thinks your house is not respectable!" She flung this over her shoulder as she stalked away, and it may be that the tears came when there were none to see them, but hers was a resolute mind, and though she continued to be friendly with Tommy and Elspeth out of doors she never again crossed their threshold.

"The house is in a terrible state for want o' you," Tommy would say, trying to wheedle her. "We hinna sanded the floor for months, and the box-iron has fallen ahint the dresser, and my gray sark is rove up the back, and oh, you should just see the holes in Aaron's stockings!"

Then Grizel rocked her arms in agony, but no, she would not go in.

CHAPTER XX

THE SHADOW OF SIR WALTER

Tommy was in Miss Ailie's senior class now, though by no means at the top of it, and her mind was often disturbed about his future. On this subject Aaron had never spoken to anyone, and the problem gave Tommy himself so little trouble that all Elspeth knew was that he was to be great and that she was to keep his house. So the school-mistress braved an interview with Aaron for the sake of her favourite.

"You know he is a remarkable boy," she said.

"At his lessons, ma'am?" asked Aaron, quietly.

Not exactly at his lessons, she had to admit.

"In what way, then, ma'am?"

Really Miss Ailie could not say. There was something wonderful about Tommy, you felt it, but you could not quite give it a name. The warper must have noticed it himself.

"I've heard him saying something o' the kind to Elspeth," was Aaron's reply.

"But sometimes he is like a boy inspired," said the school-mistress. "You must have seen that?"

"When he was thinking o' himsel'," answered Aaron.

"He has such noble sentiments."

"He has."

"And I think, I really think," said Miss Ailie, eagerly, for this was what she had come to say, "that he has got great gifts for the ministry."

"I'm near sure o't," said Aaron, grimly.

"Ah, I see you don't like him."

"I dinna," the warper acknowledged quietly, "but I've been trying to do my duty by him for all that. It's no every laddie that gets three years' schooling straight on end."

This was true, but Miss Ailie used it to press her point. "You have done so well by him," she said, "that I think you should keep him at school for another year or two, and so give him a chance of carrying a bursary. If he carries one it will support him at college; if he does not — well, then I suppose he must be apprenticed to some trade."

"No," Aaron said, decisively; "if he gets the chance of a college education and flings it awa', I'll waste no more siller on his keep. I'll send him straight to the herding."

"And I shall not blame you," Miss Ailie declared eagerly.

"Though I would a hantle rather," continued the warper, "waur my money on Elspeth."

"What you spend on him," Miss Ailie argued, "you will really be spending on her, for if he rises in the world he will not leave Elspeth behind. You are prejudiced against him, but you cannot deny that."

"I dinna deny but what he's fond o' her," said Aaron, and after considering the matter for some days he decided that Tommy should get his chance. The school-mistress had not acted selfishly, for this decision, as she knew, meant that the boy must now be placed in the hands of Mr. Cathro, who was a Greek and Latin scholar. She taught Latin herself, it is true, but as cautiously as she crossed a plank bridge, and she was never comfortable in the dominie's company, because even at a tea-table he would refer familiarly to the ablative absolute instead of letting sleeping dogs lie.

"But Elspeth couldna be happy if we were at different schools," Tommy objected instantly.

"Yes, I could," said Elspeth, who had been won over by Miss Ailie; "it will be so fine, Tommy, to see you again after I hinna seen you for three hours."

Tommy was little known to Mr. Cathro at this time, except as the boy who had got the better of a rival teacher in the affair of Corp, which had delighted him greatly. "But if the sacket thinks he can play any of his tricks on me," he told Aaron, "there is an awakening before him," and

he began the cramming of Tommy for a bursary with perfect confidence.

But before the end of the month, at the mere mention of Tommy's name, Mr. Cathro turned red in the face, and the fingers of his laying-on hand would clutch an imaginary pair of tawse. Already Tommy had made him self-conscious. He peered covertly at Tommy, and Tommy caught him at it every time, and then each quickly looked another way, and Cathro vowed never to look again, but did it next minute, and what enraged him most was that he knew Tommy noted his attempts at self-restraint as well as his covert glances. All the other pupils knew that a change for the worse had come over the dominie's temper. They saw him punish Tommy frequently without perceptible cause, and that he was still unsatisfied when the punishment was over. This apparently was because Tommy gave him a look before returning to his seat. When they had been walloped they gave Cathro a look also, but it merely meant, "Oh, that this was a dark road and I had a divot in my hand!" while his look was unreadable, that is unreadable to them, for the dominie understood it and writhed. What it said was, "You think me a wonder, and therefore I forgive you."

"And sometimes he fair beats Cathro!" So Tommy's schoolmates reported at home, and the

dominie had to acknowledge its truth to Aaron. "I wish you would give that sacket a thrashing for me," he said, half furiously, yet with a grin on his face, one day when he and the warper chanced to meet on the Monypenny road.

"I'll no lay a hand on bairn o' Jean Myles," Aaron replied. "Ay, and I understood you to say that he should meet his match in you."

"Did I ever say that, man? Well, well, we live and learn."

"What has he been doing now?"

"What has he been doing!" echoed Cathro. "He has been making me look foolish in my own class-room. Yes, sir, he has so completely got the better of me (and not for the first time) that when I tell the story of how he diddled Mr. Ogilvy, Mr. Ogilvy will be able to cap it with the story of how the little whelp diddled me. Upon my soul, Aaron, he is running away with all my self-respect and destroying my sense of humour."

What had so crushed the dominie was the affair of Francie Crabb. Francie was now a pupil, like Gavin Dishart and Tommy, of Mr. Cathro's, who detested the boy's golden curls, perhaps because he was bald himself. They were also an incentive to evil-doing on the part of other boys, who must give them a tug in passing, and on a day the dominie said, in a fury, "Give your mother my compliments, Francie, and tell her I'm so tired of see-

ing your curls that I mean to cut them off to-morrow morning."

"Say he shall not," whispered Tommy.

"You shanna!" blurted out Francie.

"But I will," said Cathro; "I would do it now if I had the shears."

It was only an empty threat, but an hour afterwards the dominie caught Tommy wagering in witchy marbles and other coin that he would not do it, and then instead of taking the tawse to him he said, "Keep him to his bargains, laddies, for whatever may have been my intention at the time, I mean to be as good as my word now."

He looked triumphantly at Tommy, who, however, instead of seeming crestfallen, continued to bet, and now the other boys were eager to close with him, for great was their faith in Cathro. These transactions were carried out on the sly, but the dominie knew what was going on, and despite his faith in himself he had his twitches of uneasiness.

"However, the boy can only be trusting to fear of Mrs. Crabb restraining me," he decided, and he marched into the school-room next morning, ostentatiously displaying his wife's largest scissors. His pupils crowded in after him, and though he noticed that all were strangely quiet and many wearing scared faces, he put it down to the coming scene. He could not resist giving one triumphant

glance at Tommy, who, however, instead of returning it, looked modestly down. Then — "Is Francie Crabb here?" asked Mr. Cathro, firmly.

"He's hodding ahint the press," cried a dozen voices.

"Come forward, Francie," said the dominie, clicking the shears to encourage him.

There was a long pause, and then Francie emerged in fear from behind the press. Yes, it was Francie, but his curls were gone!

The shears fell to the floor. "Who did this?" roared the terrible Cathro.

"It was Tommy Sandys," blurted out Francie, in tears.

The school-master was unable to speak, and, alarmed at the stillness, Francie whined, "He said it would be done at ony rate, and he promised me half his winnings."

It is still remembered by bearded men and married women who were at school that day how Cathro leaped three forms to get at Tommy, and how Tommy cried under the tawse and yet laughed ecstatically at the same time, and how subsequently he and Francie collected so many dues that the pockets of them stood out like brackets from their little persons.

The dominie could not help grinning a little at his own discomfiture as he told this story, but Aaron saw nothing amusing in it. "As I telled

you," he repeated, "I winna touch him, so if you're no content wi' what you've done yoursel', you had better put Francie's mither on him."

"I hear she has taken him in hand already," Mr. Cathro replied dryly. "But, Aaron, I wish you would at least keep him closer to his lessons at night, for it is seldom he comes to the school well prepared."

"I see him sitting lang ower his books," said Aaron.

"Ay, maybe, but is he at them?" responded the dominie with a shake of the head that made Aaron say, with his first show of interest in the conversation, "You have little faith in his carrying a bursary, I see."

But this Mr. Cathro would not admit, for if he thought Tommy a numskull the one day he often saw cause to change his mind the next, so he answered guardedly, "It's too soon to say, Aaron, for he has eighteen months' stuffing to undergo yet before we send him to Aberdeen to try his fortune, and I have filled some gey toom wimes in eighteen months. But you must lend me a hand."

The weaver considered, and then replied stubbornly, "No, I give him his chance, but I'll have nocht to do wi' his use o't. And, dominie, I want you to say not another word to me about him atween this and examination time, for my mind's made up no to say a word to him. It's well kent

that I'm no more fit to bring up bairns than to have them (dinna conter me, man, for the thing was proved lang syne at the Cuttle Well), and so till that time I'll let him gang his ain gait. But if he doesna carry a bursary, to the herding he goes. I've said it and I'll stick to it."

So, as far as Aaron was concerned, Tommy was left in peace to the glory of collecting his winnings from those who had sworn by Cathro, and among them was Master Gavin Ogilvy Dishart, who now found himself surrounded by a debt of sixpence, a degrading position for the son of an Auld Licht minister.

Tommy would not give him time, but was willing to take his copy of "Waverley" as full payment.

Gavin offered him "Ivanhoe" instead, because his mother had given a read of "Waverley" to Gavinia, Miss Ailie's servant, and she read so slowly, putting her finger beneath each word, that she had not yet reached the middle. Also, she was so enamoured of the work that she would fight anyone who tried to take it from her.

Tommy refused "Ivanhoe," as it was not about Jacobites, but suggested that Gavinia should be offered it in lieu of "Waverley," and told that it was a better story.

The suggestion came too late, as Gavinia had already had a loan of "Ivanhoe," and read it with

rapture, inch by inch. However, if Tommy would wait a month, or ——

Tommy was so eager to read more about the Jacobites that he found it trying to wait five minutes. He thought Gavin's duty was to get his father to compel Gavinia to give the book up.

Was Tommy daft? Mr. Dishart did not know that his son possessed these books. He did not approve of story books, and when Mrs. Dishart gave them to Gavin on his birthday she — she had told him to keep them out of his father's sight. (Mr. and Mrs. Dishart were very fond of each other, but there were certain little matters that she thought it unnecessary to trouble him about.)

So if Tommy was to get "Waverley" at once, he must discover another way. He reflected, and then set off to Miss Ailie's (to whom he still read sober works of an evening, but novels never), looking as if he had found a way.

For some time Miss Ailie had been anxious about her red-armed maid, who had never before given pain unless by excess of willingness, as when she offered her garter to tie Miss Ailie's parcels with. Of late, however, Gavinia had taken to blurting out disquieting questions, to the significance of which she withheld the key, such as —

"Is there ony place nowadays, ma'am, where there's tourniements? And could an able-bodied

lassie walk to them? and what might be the charge to win in?"

Or, "Would you no like to be so michty beautiful, ma'am, that as soon as the men saw your bonny face they just up wi' you in their arms and ran?"

Or again, "What's the heaviest weight o' a woman a grand lusty man could carry in his arms as if she were an infant?"

This method of conveyance seemed to have a peculiar fascination for Gavinia, and she got herself weighed at the flesher's. On another occasion she broke a glass candlestick, and all she said to the pieces was, "Wha carries me, wears me."

This mystery was troubling the school-mistress sadly when Tommy arrived with the key to it. "I'm doubting Gavinia's reading ill books on the sly," he said.

"Never!" exclaimed Miss Ailie, "she reads nothing but the *Mentor*."

Tommy shook his head, like one who would fain hope so, but could not overlook facts. "I've been hearing," he said, "that she reads books as are full o' Strokes and Words We have no Concern with."

Miss Ailie could not believe it, but she was advised to search the kitchen, and under Gavinia's mattress was found the dreadful work.

"And you are only fifteen!" said Miss Ailie, eyeing her little maid sorrowfully.

"The easier to carry," replied Gavinia, darkly.

"And you named after a minister!" Miss Ailie continued, for her maid had been christened Gavinia because she was the first child baptized in his church after the Rev. Gavin Dishart came to Thrums. "Gavinia, I must tell him of this. I shall take this book to Mr. Dishart this very day."

"The right man to take it to," replied the maid, sullenly, "for it's his ain."

"Gavinia!"

"Well, it was Mrs. Dishart that lended it to me."

"I — I never saw it on the manse shelves."

"I'm thinking," said the brazen Gavinia, "as there's hoddy corners in manses as well as in — blue-and-white rooms."

This dark suggestion was as great a shock to the gentle school-mistress as if out of a clear sky had come suddenly the word —

Stroke!

She tottered with the book that had so demoralized the once meek Gavinia into the blue-and-white room, where Tommy was restlessly awaiting her, and when she had told him all, he said, with downcast eyes:

"I was never sure o' Mrs. Dishart. When I hand her the *Mentor* she looks as if she didna care a stroke for 't——"

"Tommy!"

"I'm doubting," he said sadly, that she's ower fond o' Words We have no Concern with."

Miss Ailie would not listen to such talk, but she approved of the suggestion that "Waverley" should be returned not to the minister, but to his wife, and she accepted gratefully Tommy's kindly offer to act as bearer. Only happening to open the book in the middle, she ——

"I'm waiting," said Tommy, after ten minutes.

She did not hear him.

"I'm waiting," he said again, but she was now in the next chapter.

"Maybe you would like to read it yoursel'!" he cried, and then she came to, and with a shudder handed him the book. But after he had gone she returned to the kitchen to reprove Gavinia at greater length, and in the midst of the reproof she said faintly: "You did not happen to look at the end, did you?"

"That I did," replied Gavinia.

"And did she — did he ——"

"No," said Gavinia, sorrowfully.

Miss Ailie sighed. "That's what I think too," said Gavinia.

"Why didn't they?" asked the school-mistress.

"Because he was just a sumph," answered Gavinia scornfully. "If he had been like Fergus, or like the chield in 'Ivanhoe,' he wouldna have ta'en a 'no.' He would just have whipped her up

in his arms and away wi' her. That's the kind for me, ma'am."

"There is a fascination about them," murmured Miss Ailie.

"A what?"

But again Miss Ailie came to. "For shame, Gavinia, for shame!" she said, severely; "these are disgraceful sentiments."

In the meantime Tommy had hurried with the book, not to the manse, but to a certain garret, and as he read, his imagination went on fire. Blinder's stories had made him half a Jacobite, and now "Waverley" revealed to him that he was born neither for the ministry nor the herding, but to restore to his country its rightful king. The first to whom he confided this was Corp, who immediately exclaimed: "Michty me! But what will the police say?"

"I ken a wy," answered Tommy, sternly.

END OF PART I

THE DE VINNE PRESS